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THE WINGED VICTORY

BY

SARAH GRAND

THE WINGED VICTORY

THE WINGED VICTORY

BY

SARAH GRAND

AUTHOR OF "THE HEAVENLY TWINS," "THE BETH BOOK," "ADAM'S ORCHARD," ETC.

"I call you philoprogenitive mad, Ninny," said Lord Terry de Beach. "'*Voyez-vous, nos enfants nous sont bien necessaires, Seigneur.*' Victor Hugo, eh?" said the Duke.

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

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TO

ELIZABETH

FOR

JOY OF HER LAUGHTER

"When the noise of the workshop is over and mallet and plane laid aside, the faint sounds come through the window and from the valley and the far seashore. So the dim fringe of diviner knowledge begins to grow as soon as the eternal click-clack of thought is over—the extraordinary intuitions, perceptions, which though partaking in some degree of the character and thought, spring from ultimately different conditions, and are the forerunners of a changed consciousness."
—A Visit to a Gnani, or Wise Man of the East.

EDWARD CARPENTER

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BOOK I

A MOTLEY CREW

CHAPTER I

THE CORNER HOUSE IN THE SIDE STREET

1

THE train ran into the great London terminus as if it meant to leap the end platform and make a dash for liberty through the waiting-rooms out into the world beyond; but it pulled up just in time, and with a jerk, as if it had suddenly changed its mind. The huge engine, still panting and snorting with excitement, stood breasting the buffers proudly, the winner of a great race, a race against time; and elderly, affluent, fidgety gentlemen, of a punctual habit, returning their watches to their pockets, congratulated themselves and each other on a splendid run from Closeminster.

Standing on the platform, awaiting the arrival of the train, was a man answering to this description in every respect save one. A man of forty, he looked elderly though not old, his whole appearance proclaimed him affluent, and the time of his arrival, with a few minutes to spare, vouched for a punctual habit; but he was not fidgety. Decided and eminently discreet are the words which best describe him. On entering the station he had placed himself so that any one arriving by the expected train must pass him on the way out. Standing where he did, there was no possibility of missing the person he had come to meet, if he knew that person by sight. And having taken up this position, he stood with his hands resting on the handle of his neat umbrella, glancing about him indifferently. Not a flicker of expression disturbed his face. The most intelligent observer, versed in the subtle signs by which the inner man is apt involuntarily to make evident the workings of his mind and betray his feelings, would have been at fault. There was no clue to be seized upon for a guide to this man's

thoughts. His long thin nose twitched frequently, an indication, as it seemed, of some physical discomfort, like the switching of a cow's tail when the flies are troublesome on a hot day. That he was waiting was evident, but that was all. He waited impassively as a middle-aged family butler waits between the courses when the guests have been served; you only discover that he has been watching you when he brings you something which he must have seen that you lacked. A family butler might have looked like this gentleman, but this gentleman did not look like a family butler. He was a serving man, but not of the servant class; a money-maker, but payed in fees, not in wages. This gentleman did not take orders; he was instructed. He was one to be approached with flattering deference to his knowledge and opinion; and if he were subservient, it would only be in the way of business.

In domestic matters he was one to rule, but by tact and subtlety; all vulgar emphasis he carefully eschewed. His tall hat, neither in nor out of the fashion; his well-cut black morning-coat and dark-grey trousers; his neat boots; his neutral-tinted tie, pinned with the most modest of jewels—a pearl—which had the inestimable charm of great price without the drawback of display; his chevrette gloves, his neat umbrella—all his appointments proclaimed him a man of substance, well laid out; and his confident bearing furthermore proclaimed him a man of assured position in his own walk of life; a professional man, without doubt, doctor or lawyer. As a matter of fact, he was a lawyer, Mr. Aloysius Blimber Bosc by name, ruling partner in the old and eminent firm of Bosc, Blimber, and Screen.

Length without breadth summarises the salient effect of Mr. Bosc's appearance. His feet were long and narrow, his legs and body long and thin; so also was his clean-shaven face, and his long thin nose shadowed a long thin-lipped mouth. His head and hair were the surprise of his appearance. Figuratively speaking, his head was certainly long, but outwardly the breadth of it betokened an ample case for a well-balanced brain. To be in harmony with his general appearance, his hair should have been long, thin, lanky, and neutral-tinted; but it was short, thick, crisp, and a bright black, sparsely sprinkled with grey. Strength showed in his hair and power in the shape of his head. There could be nothing neurotic in such a man with such hair. Texture, colour, and abundance vouched for his health and

vigour. It was decorative too, an afterthought of Nature's, or a careless experiment in a mixture of styles. Setting well round his forehead, it enriched, with its wavy luxuriance, his otherwise attenuated appearance. And in the brightness of his deep-set keen grey-green eyes, also, vitality shone, but discreetly veiled by the shadow of his thick black overhanging eyebrows.

His mother, who was ruling partner in the firm of Mr. and Mrs. Bosc, had him christened Aloysius Blimber; Aloysius for his patron saint, she being a good Catholic, Blimber partly because it was her maiden name, partly because of the letter B. She admired the fine alliterative effect of Blimber Bosc; also, and lastly, because A. B. B. stood for what he was in her opinion from the moment of his birth till the day of her death—A Beautiful Boy.

Parents have no conscience in the christening of their children, their own pleasure of the moment being their one consideration. Many are burdened for life with names they detest, and handicapped besides, like the brothers Philip Ignatous and David Oliver Goodman, P. I. G. and D. O. G. At school, because of his argumentativeness, Mr. Bosc's initials gained him the title of "A Blithering Beast," or "A Beastly Bore," but these aspersions fell from him in after life as inappropriate. Among his professional brethren he was known as Affable or Adaptable Bosc. The terms are interchangeable. Adaptation to the varying humours of mankind connotes affability. And professional acuteness was not at fault. Affability was the secret of Mr. Bosc's success.

2

Mr. Bosc stooped slightly from the shoulders as he stood, a habit he had acquired by bending forward to listen to confidential communications; but he could be upright enough when uprightness was the better attitude for his purpose; and, as the train came thundering in, he straightened himself, and his keen grey-green eyes quickened to attention. In an instant all was confusion—steam roaring, voices shouting. Passengers pouring from the carriages swirled by, jostling him; porters carrying packages, or pushing trucks piled high with luggage, made for him direct, shouting, "By your leave, please!" But he stood his ground, a human rock in that eddying human current, until the train had apparently emptied itself, and, of the crowd, only

some few individuals, collected about the luggage van, remained. It seemed that the object of his vigil had not arrived, but, to make sure, he screwed up his eyes in an effort to focus them, and looked along the train, and as he did so, he saw, at the end farthest from him, a young woman alight from a third-class carriage.

But she did not look like a third-class passenger. Her dress was simple enough, a blue serge coat and skirt, and all else black; but it was not cheap simplicity. It was the dress of a lady, worn with distinction.

A porter, hurrying up, asked if she had any luggage.

"I am to be met," she said, revealing herself in five words as sweet-voiced, gentle, and courteous.

She looked about her composedly, but with large-eyed interest. This was her first experience of a London terminus.

The waiting porter looked at her, and, as he looked, his spirits rose. He felt jolly, like dancing a jig.

The legal gentleman did not know her by sight, and the only guide he had to her appearance was a remark let fall by the client for whom he was acting: "Something unusual about her, don't you know? Sort of girl you don't see every day."

As a compact indication, however, it covered the ground for the business man with a completeness which no amount of detail could have accomplished. The girl who got out of the third-class carriage was certainly not the sort of girl you see every day.

"Distinguished-looking," Mr. Bosc labelled her from a distance.

As he approached near enough to see her distinctly this first impression was more than confirmed.

"She is very beautiful," he thought, and wondered at the restraint of his client's indication.

The porter saw him approaching. "That'll be the gent as is comin' to meet you, p'raps, miss," he said. He expected a gent to meet this exhilarating young lady. Her father, he supposed, and felt relieved. Even a railway porter likes to know that the lists are still open.

Beauty involuntarily exacts homage which it is a pleasure to pay. Mr. Bosc did homage with his hat, and gravely.

The effect of exceeding beauty is solemnising; it appeals to the highest in the better nature of a man as something sacred. He does not greet it as he does mere prettiness, with the lip-

service of a smile. Mr. Bosc addressed this girl with bent body and uncovered head. Extreme deference came naturally at the moment, and he was not aware that it was extreme. He became aware of it afterwards, however, when analysing his impressions of the meeting. The girl had no rank, she was a lacemaker of humble extraction, yet he had honoured her as he would have honoured a crowned head. And with good reason, since she wore the crown honoured of all men universally, the crown of beauty, jewelled with good repute.

On reflection, Mr. Bosc was content with himself. It is good to be a lawyer of ability, but it is better to be a man, with all that being a man imports.

"Miss Ella Banks, I believe," he said. "I am Mr. Bosc, representative of the Duchess of Castlefield Saye. I preferred to meet you myself."

"Thank you," Ella answered. But she did not understand the distinction conferred by this personal attention on the part of the ruling member of the old and eminent firm of Bosc, Blimber, and Screen. And this was obvious to Mr. Bosc, who noted the fact with a twitch of his sensitive nose.

"Luggage, sir?" the porter put in, touching his cap.

"Yes, see to it," Mr. Bosc replied.

"'Ow many, lidy?"

"One box. Buff. Compressed cane. Initials E.B.," Ella answered categorically, making the prosaic details musical by the timbre of her voice. Her even, unhasting utterance, gentle but decided, giving to each word full weight, produced on Mr. Bosc an impression of sureness, sincerity, and strength. Smiling, he observed: "A practical young lady."

"I am a working woman," she replied. "Perhaps you do not know——"

"I do know," he caught her up. "If you will follow me"—he led the way—"we legal men have to know. If I may say it without irreverence, from us no secrets are hid."

"There are no secrets in my case. It is simple enough," Ella answered.

The lawyer compressed his lips.

"I am to have the pleasure of seeing you comfortably settled," he said.

"You are very kind," she thanked him quietly.

Her whole demeanour was the demeanour of a well-bred woman, graceful, simple, composed. As she walked beside him,

Mr. Bosc discreetly observed her with his air of noticing nothing. Certainly she was not the sort of girl you see every day.

A close carriage and pair was waiting in the courtyard of the station. The servants were quietly liveried in black; the whole turnout was quiet—conspicuously quiet it would have looked to the experienced eye of one who knows what it costs to be sumptuously inconspicuous. The carriage groom, who stood by the door, opened it, and touched his hat as they approached. Ella stepped in. Mr. Bosc, having discreetly tipped the porter, followed her. He noted Ella's composure. It was as if she had expected to be met by a man of means and position with a perfectly appointed carriage and pair. Would a clerk and a cab have surprised her? he wondered. Yet he understood now what, before he saw her, he had considered the extravagant lavishness of the arrangements his client had insisted upon. He would have done as much himself.

"I began to think that you had not come," he remarked, as they drove off.

"I did not know that I had arrived," she explained. "I sat still when the train stopped until I saw that everybody else was getting out."

"Your first visit to London?"

"My first visit to London."

"Your impressions will be interesting."

"If they do not suffer from overcrowding and obliterate each other."

"Ah! neat," he said. The neatness gave him an opening—Adaptable Bosc. "I always congratulate people who have left themselves something to learn as they grow older," he observed. "The experiences of youth find us fresh, but they do not find us appreciative."

"But there must always be something to learn," she thought.

"I am speaking of what learning teaches us," he explained; "of what we learn from new experiences, personal experiences. I was so fortunate myself as not to have made the acquaintance of certain well-known books until I grew up. Novels, for instance. I only lately read George Eliot for the first time. That was a great experience. Had I made the acquaintance of her wonderful mind earlier, I must have failed to appreciate her genius. I should not have known enough myself to gauge the extent of her powers by comparison."

"I think I see what you mean," Ella answered with interest. "You tested her knowledge of the world by your own."

"Precisely. And added to my own."

"Then an impression is a story without a moral; an experience teaches us something?" Ella suggested. "I shall have impressions enough, stories minus morals, I suppose." She sighed. "I come to London without knowledge of the world."

"If you are ever at a loss, my knowledge is at your service," he assured her.

"You are kind," she said, and smiled upon him.

He had a dry way of speaking, a way of compressing his thin lips, and of looking at you out of his grey-green eyes, that made you feel yourself nothing to him but a matter of business. His clients relied on his business capacity; they rarely appealed to his feelings. As a rule they did not realise that he had any. They were mostly people great in the matter of social position, who knew him only as a capable lawyer. As a human being who might have home ties and family affection he did not exist for the nobility and gentry. He was only a part of the machinery of the law to them, not a human being at all. But long intercourse with these people had not dulled his senses or sapped his manhood. Responding to their expectation he had grown, in working hours, to be more of a machine than of a man, yet for all that he remained man enough to be capable of answering to other kinds of expectation. This inexperienced girl had taken him at his word, and it pleased him, because she pleased him—as she had pleased the porter at the railway station. In this respect there was no difference between the great London lawyer and the railway porter. In her exhilarating presence the porter felt that he could dance a jig; the lawyer discovered that he wanted to be kind to her.

The kindnesses of men to women are nicely regulated by the pleasure received. Mr. Bosc had not intended to be kinder than self-interest made advisable. He had used the formula in the conventional sense only. But under the influence of Ella's smile he became aware of a strange pleasant sensation, and when she said, "You are kind," he felt the intention genuine, and his whole being expanded in the desire to serve her disinterestedly. If he had been a dog he would have wagged his tail, although he would not have been the kind of dog that is given to wagging its tail. Nose twitching and eyes blinking, he sat, looking out of the window at nothing; but his inward eye

was open. He was intent upon his companion, not criticising, well pleased, his judgment held in suspense.

They were in a crowded thoroughfare, a main artery of traffic, fashionable and commercial. Smart carriages, omnibuses, tradesmen's carts, heavy drays, some fast, some slow, some stationary, some causing eddies to swirl in the traffic by pulling up suddenly,—surrounded them; and on the pavements, and in and out among the close-packed vehicles, foot passengers crowded, jostling each other, hurrying, loitering, stopping, darting across the road, in orderly confusion playing the game—the game of life, in which each individual has a separate and independent part, yet is, at the same time, in combination with every other individual engaged in the game, each and all playing both for themselves and for each other, according to rule.

A great van, towering high above the carriage, came lumbering down upon it, as if determined to annihilate it. For a breathless instant the wheels grazed each other. Mr. Bosc glanced at Ella out of the corner of his eye. She did not flinch.

"How do you feel in this crowd?" he asked.

"It strikes me that there is no confusion," she answered.

"That was a near shave," he remarked.

"Yes," she agreed. "And not the sort of death I should have chosen. Our remains would have been picked up and cleared away, and all would have gone on again in a few minutes as if nothing had happened, I suppose—'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?'"

"A moral!" Mr. Bosc exclaimed.

"An experience then, not mere impression," she rejoined.

"Mere impressions are for the shallow," he said, with another sidelong glance at her.

She inclined her head slightly, but whether she perceived the compliment implied, or was merely politely acknowledging the remark, he could not tell.

They had turned up a side street, out of the roar of the traffic, a street of handsome "family mansions" of irregular build, suggestive of individual taste and the means to indulge it in their owners. The resulting effect was picturesque. Looking up the street, it appeared to be a *cul-de-sac,* but at the top it branched off sharply to the right. The Corner House at the projecting angle looked both ways. Architecturally it was the plainest, and on that account the least arresting to the eye, but

in point of size it was one of the best in the street. It was at the door of the Corner House that the carriage stopped.

The carriage groom ran up the steps and rang. The door was opened immediately by an elderly bearded man in a dark uniform, with several medal ribbons on his breast. Mr. Bosc alighted, and offered his hand to Ella. "Here we are," he said.

Ella saw wrought-iron railings, broad stone steps, a deep portico, and massive pillars—the typical entrance to a "handsome Family Mansion."

"This is not a shop," she said.

"No," he answered in his dry way. "Shops are not allowed in this street."

This required explanation, for she had come to open a shop; but she asked no questions, made no remark.

The elderly bearded man stood to attention and touched his uniform cap.

"Your commissionaire," Mr. Bosc explained. "Beveridge. He has the privilege of wearing a beard as well as a moustache because he was a pioneer."

Ella held out her hand. Beveridge was surprised, and responded awkwardly, with his eyes gravely intent on the smile she gave him. Mr. Bosc also noted that smile as likely to be captivating. Not being for him it did not penetrate the armour of his profession which he was wearing on his heart at the moment, but it won the old soldier's loyal allegiance, heart and soul.

"I am a pioneer, too," she said.

"Indeed, my lady," Beveridge responded.

And ever afterwards he stuck to "my lady" or "my young lady," the lady of his humble devotion.

What Mr. Bosc thought of this episode, no one could have guessed. He closed it abruptly.

"We will inspect the house, with your permission," he said. "The entrance hall is good."

Ella obediently began to inspect.

It was, in fact, a fine entrance hall, paved with black and white marble, and panelled. A broad staircase on the left led up to a gallery which ran round three sides of it.

"It was last inhabited by Lady Alicia Brabant, a sister of the present Duke," Mr. Bosc proceeded, "and is just as she left it when she died. Chinese ebony, you see, topped with coloured

marble, and handsomely carved. Sombre, certainly, but admirable, both in taste and tone."

Ella nodded, but made no other sign.

At the end of the hall, opposite the entrance, there were high double doors. Ella looked at these, curious to know what was beyond.

Mr. Bosc signed to Beveridge. Beveridge flung wide the doors, and Ella's eyes opened wide also, momentarily. She entered in advance of Mr. Bosc.

"The ballroom," he said. "The—er—my client—thought it would answer your purpose. Eighteenth century. Vanloos and Bouchers inset in the gilded panels. The ceiling—often mistaken for Grindling Gibbons by people who are shaky in their dates—is Adam at his best. Consoles, chairs, settees, Louis Quinze—or is it Louis Seize?" Mr. Bosc smiled at his own shakiness. "Notice the fine silk tapestry on the seats; and these splendid hanging lustres with cut glass pendants; also the sconces on the walls, the branching candelabra. The whole room, in fact, is in perfect eighteenth-century taste; and that, to my mind, in grace and beauty cannot be surpassed."

Ella walked away from him. She looked up at the ceiling, she looked at lustres, sconces, pilastres, and panels; at gilt consoles and graceful settees, and nodded a silent comment on each. Shallow steps led up to a daïs at the end of the room. Above was a musician's gallery, supported by marble pillars. She mounted the steps and stood between the pillars. She knew nothing of eighteenth-century art, but the whole effect delighted her, and she took the vast apartment to her heart.

Mr. Bosc stood where she had left him, hat and umbrella in hand, watching her with discreetly veiled attention, nose twitching, eyes blinking; his modernity the one discordant note.

Ella returned to him. "It is a beautiful room," she said. "Where does that door lead to?"

The door she indicated did not challenge attention. It was on the same side of the room as the entrance from the hall.

"I will show you," he said, and, going forward, he opened the door, and stood aside for her to pass in.

"The house has been untouched since Lady Alicia Brabant died," Mr. Bosc repeated. "Everything is just as she left it. My client thought you might, perhaps, like to exercise your own taste. You can alter anything you like. This room, for

instance. It was Lady Alicia's morning-room. It is old-fashioned, of course——"

Ella thought it charming.

"My client decided, subject to your approval, that it would be highly convenient for you——"

"But I do not understand," she interrupted. "I expected to be put into a shop. This house——?"

"This house," Mr. Bosc explained, "used to be the Dower House of the family—the Brabant family. The present Duke lent it to his sister, the Lady Alicia, for life, there being no Dowager Duchess to occupy it. He has made other arrangements for the present Duchess in case he predeceases her. The house is now yours, just as it stands, with everything in it, to do as you like with—or, I should say, it will be yours when you have gone through the formality of signing a document. There is only one condition attached. The house must not be made to look like a shop, or in any way be advertised as a shop."

Ella had flushed as he spoke; now her countenance fell. She had pictured to herself a shop-window full of lace. "Then how are people to know about my business?" she objected.

"You may safely leave all that to me," he replied in a tone of finality. "That can be arranged. But the first thing to be done, if I may venture to suggest, is to get you settled in, and all ready. Your ideas are to be carried out to the letter. You have only to order. I am further instructed to remind you that I am acting on behalf of the Duchess of Castlefield Saye."

Ella was feeling overwhelmed. She could not speak, only her eyes answered him.

But the legal gentleman had to make sure.

"You understand that it is the *Duchess* who is doing all this for you?" he insisted.

"I understand," she said. "The Duchess is setting me up in business. The Duchess is munificent."

He acknowledged this with a bow on the Duchess's behalf.

"The rich and great are the natural guardians of Art," he said. "In former days they were called the patrons of Art, but times have changed. Patronage has become an offence, therefore we now say Guardians of Art. And it must be remembered that it is one of the pleasures of the rich and great, as well as one of their privileges, to be the Guardians of Art;

a pleasure which any artist may accord them without loss of dignity. Shall we decide about this room?"

He looked round, eyes blinking, nose twitching. "The—er—my client," he pursued, "thought you would like to begin by exercising your individual taste on your own special sanctum,—if you decide to make this room your own special sanctum, and it has everything to recommend it. You would be on the spot here, so to speak, and also in complete privacy. You see there are three doors"—he went to each, and opened it as he spoke—"one leading into the ballroom, your showroom which is to be; one into the hall; and the third into this passage, where there is a back staircase leading direct to your sleeping apartment and other parts of the house. Means of escape in plenty without appearing in public. The dining-room and library are on this floor," he added. "The drawing-rooms are upstairs."

Ella, who had recovered herself, nodded comprehension gravely.

Her composure began to annoy Mr. Bosc, because it was puzzling. Here was a girl fresh from a small farmhouse in the depths of the country, who had hitherto had no greater convenience for social intercourse or privacy than the parlour of a humble tenant farmer with a large family could afford, nodding her understanding of the advantage of having the means of escape from her sitting-room, like any woman of the world; unimpressed by an allusion to drawing-rooms; and, in fact, taking it altogether for granted that she should find herself suddenly installed, the possessor of a mansion fit for the daughter of a duke. Had she expected it? No, Mr. Bosc was sure she had not. Then whence her composure? Mr. Bosc concluded that it was inability to comprehend. This was natural enough in an inexperienced country girl, and Mr. Bosc's annoyance passed off.

He had already gone through several alternations of mood since he made the acquaintance of Miss Ella Banks, and he was destined to go through several more.

Ella stood peering about her intently, with an expression of inquiry on her face. Curious to know what it meant, Mr. Bosc remarked: "Something strikes you?"

Her answer was surprising. "It strikes me," she said, and paused, looking about her again wonderingly. "It strikes me—that I have been here—before."

Her eyes raised to his invited explanation.

"Not an unprecedented experience," he replied cautiously. "There is a scientific explanation—one lobe of the brain is said to hang fire, as it were, and afterwards it repeats a first impression, so that it seems a recollection. I'm not clear about it. I must look it up. . . . But you may have seen photographs, or heard the place described——"

"No," she answered, and stood a moment, her eyes fixed but unseeing, intent on some thought. "I shall feel at home here," she said at last, rousing herself. "It is all delightful."

"It was, in the old days," he answered, "and can easily be made so again. Of course, this room wants modernising. Satin damask for the walls, I suppose? I will have some patterns sent in. Ladies generally choose a scheme of colour to suit their complexion. But, if I may say so, any colour would suit your complexion."

Ella ignored the compliment. Mr. Bosc noted, for future guidance, that personalities were distasteful.

"Satin damask for the walls," he repeated. "Any pictures you like, gilded chairs and sofas, deep-seated, with the easiest springs; big down cushions, and an Aubusson carpet,—that is the kind of thing for a lady's boudoir."

"The kind of thing for a bonbon box," Ella observed placidly. Not a gracious speech as it appears to the eye, but as she uttered it with the parting of exquisite lips in an exquisite smile, it had the effect of provoking a smile. But Adaptable Bosc was nonplussed, as a man is apt to be who adjusts his attitude towards a modern woman by the light of some ancient generalisation. For quite a minute he was silent. Here was a novelty, a new departure in the way of young womanhood. Better let her commit herself.

"I am here to receive your orders," he said at last. "What is your idea?"

"My idea is to have the best conditions for work—air, and light, and space," she answered, her tone, as always, gently decided. "My room must look healthy and fresh. Everything in it must be cleanable. It must be clean before everything. And not made stuffy and enervating with a surplus of cushions and curtains and easy chairs."

"Your taste agrees with that of your predecessor," he said, glancing round. "There is not much to alter."

"I do not want to alter," she said. "I want to preserve.

There is only one thing I should like—a little addition—more accommodation for books."

"Ah!" The word came out like a cork from an overcharged bottle of soda water. "You know what you want!" he said with approval.

"Yes. Always," she answered. "But I do not always know how to get what I want."

"In that case, er——?"

"In *this* case I rely upon Mr. Bosc," she replied with a glance that raised him in his own estimation.

"Ah, good!" he exclaimed. "Very good indeed! In this case Mr. Bosc will do his best. Do his best, you know." He stood for a little, smiling, blinking, twitching his nose, looking about him, considering; convincingly doing his best. "To look healthy and fresh," he observed meditatively. "Yes. I see. And books. Light, air, space—and books. I see." He dropped from the meditative to the practical voice. "What do you say," he asked, "to a dado of books at the end of the room?"

"What is a dado?" Ella asked.

Affable Bosc was thankful to find that there was something she did not know. He explained, and she was pleased to consider the suggestion. Thus they arrived at an understanding, and as the young lady must require rest and refreshment after her journey, and no more could be done that day, Mr. Bosc prepared to take his leave.

"Before I go," he said, "is there anything you immediately want——?"

"Yes," she answered instantly. "Clothes, if you please."

"Ah, to be sure!" He beamed. The little trunk, looking forlorn on the top of the carriage, recurred to his mind. "I ought to have thought of that! Where is the woman who does not want clothes! Well, let me see,—there are plenty of shops where a royal trousseau can be obtained ready-made——"

Ella's fastidious upper lip indicated her opinion of the ready-made. Adaptable Bosc accused himself of a solecism, and hurriedly recanted. "But of course you scorn the ready-made. Well——" He reflected. "I know what to do!" he exclaimed. "I cannot advise you myself, but I know a lady of taste—French taste—who can and will. With your permission, I will ask her to call on you at your earliest convenience."

"Thank you," Ella answered. "My earliest convenience will

be the lady's earliest convenience to-morrow morning. May I ask who the lady is?"

"The lady," Mr. Bosc replied impressively, "is my mother."

The announcement brought the subject to a full stop. Ella did not know what to say. Looking at Mr. Bosc, long, lean, and dry, she pictured a mother for him also long, lean, and dry, and not at all the type of woman to be a criterion of taste in dress. She did not dare to refuse the offer of her guidance, and she was afraid to accept it. If their tastes clashed, Ella would be bound to hold to her own, and that would probably give offence and make difficulties. One thing, however, was reassuring, Mr. Bosc himself was well-dressed. On this hopeful though slight indication, she managed to express conventional thanks.

Mr. Bosc remembered one thing more—Mrs. Pounce. Mrs. Pounce was waiting in the hall, it appeared. He called her in.

"Mrs. Pounce is your housekeeper," he said to Ella by way of introduction.

"Mrs. Pounce, this is your young lady, Miss Ella Banks."

Mrs. Pounce was a most respectable-looking, elderly woman, of medium height, medium figure, medium colouring. She stood with folded hands and downcast eyes, the personification of servile humility.

Mrs. Pounce curtseyed. "I'm glad to see you, miss," she said. "I 'ope to give satisfaction."

But there was neither gladness nor hope in voice or face. Mrs. Pounce looked as if she had resigned herself in advance to every sort of misfortune. Only, having spoken, she glanced out of the corner of her eye at Mr. Bosc, a fleeting glance, but shrewd. It indicated to Ella that Mrs. Pounce was acting with an eye to Mr. Bosc's opinion. Ella did not feel at all inclined to shake hands with her.

"Mrs. Pounce," was Mr. Bosc's parting injunction, "you will see to the young lady's comfort in every respect."

3

Mr. Bosc's departure was signalled by the closing of the hall door. The sound produced a curious change of demeanour in Mrs. Pounce. Her humility vanished. She brisked up and altered the position of a chair, as if hers were the right to arrange. Ella, looking at her to see what she had to deal with,

caught a shrewd sidelong glance at herself from the small, penetrating eyes,—eyes that were cunning when they were not cast down in professional humility. The eyes were instantly averted. Ella would naturally have treated her housekeeper with kindly consideration, but this attitude she perceived would not do. Mrs. Pounce was an epitome of the world itself. The world is not to be conciliated; it must be mastered. Ella found herself forced to fight her first round with the world in the person of Mrs. Pounce.

Mrs. Pounce struck first. "I'm busy downstairs," she said, in an offhand way. "But I'll just show you to your room."

"My room?" Ella answered, slightly raising her eyebrows. "I have not yet chosen my room."

"Mr. Bosc's orders were," Mrs. Pounce was beginning to dictate.

"First, I must see the house," Ella interrupted, quietly but decidedly.

Mrs. Pounce changed her tactics. "You'd better 'ave a rest, after yer journey, and that," she advised, with ingratiating familiarity.

"First, I must see the house," Ella repeated without emphasis. "I will give you your orders with regard to my room when I have decided which I will have."

Mrs. Pounce had lived in the "best families" hitherto, and taken her orders from "Ladies of Title." She had flattered herself that this "Young person from the country, what was nothing but a shopkeeper come to sell lace," would be easily managed, and had, indeed, joyfully accepted the situation on this erroneous supposition. She was undeceived. The young person had come to Town prepared to be head of an establishment, and the fact that the establishment proved to be a large one instead of the small one she had expected surprised, but did not disconcert her. She was equal to the responsibility. But it was her method of making her authority felt that undeceived Mrs. Pounce—the manner she knew so well, unperemptory because expecting instant, unquestioning obedience. In Mrs. Pounce's experience, if it were not instant, unquestioning obedience, it would be short shrift. She had cringed to that manner for gain all her life, and she cringed now involuntarily.

"You might put that chair back in its place, please," Ella added.

Mrs. Pounce hastily replaced the chair.

"Thank you." Ella surveyed the room reflectively, a last look round. "Now for the house," she said. "You lead the way."

Mrs. Pounce curtseyed, and led the way.

CHAPTER II

THE BOSQUET AND THE BOSCS

1

COUNTRYWARDS and high up, at the time of this story, there stood a comfortable, unpretentious, red brick house, in grounds that were large for its size, being at least eight acres in extent. These grounds had been laid out so as to combine in miniature all the attractions of a large gentleman's place. The site had been well chosen for its natural advantages. Old trees, between which were grassy spaces adorned in due season with snowdrops, crocuses, daffodils, and violets, upspringing in unexpected clumps, contributed to the parklike effect of the approach. The avenue had to be made, but by planting quick-growing horse-chestnut trees this defect had been remedied with the least possible delay. An excellent kitchen garden, a small Italian garden with a fountain in the middle, a rock garden, herbaceous borders sheltered by hedges of privet, holly, and yew, and even a maze, had all been carefully planned and laid out in suitable positions. The whole pleasance was surrounded by a grey stone wall ingeniously concealed, wherever concealment was possible, by shrubberies planted so as to produce an illusion of space. By this device the grounds were made to appear to extend beyond their own restricted limits indefinitely, the artifice being helped by the park of a neighbouring mansion on the one side, and by the sudden slope of the hill on the other. Here the drop was abrupt enough to hide the point to which the town, stealthily creeping out, had encroached on what was once a delightful country retreat; by this drop sundry disfiguring buildings were kept out of sight, and the landscape that appeared was at a sufficient distance to conceal from the eye all that was undesirable from the picturesque standpoint.

Everywhere that an arbour could conveniently be placed an arbour stood, the excuse being a view of some kind. The Italian

garden, the rock garden, even the kitchen garden was thus overlooked—or shall we say especially the kitchen garden? For no lover of good things could have failed to rejoice in the succulent promise of that view! The sheltering walls holding up ripening fruit to the sun, the asparagus and celery beds, sea kale pots, cucumber frames; the potatoes, the rows of peas in various stages of growth; the yellowy lettuces, the mint and flavouring herbs; and the whole garnished—as an artist cook, who knows what an aid the eye is to the appetite, garnishes his dishes—with flower borders jewelled with colour. Oh, certainly, we must say, whatever the time of year, especially the kitchen garden!

But it was these arbours which betrayed the designer for no Englishman. No Englishman uses paint to supplement nature. Because there are no persuading garlands of flowers tied with ribbons to bloom in an arbour all the year round, or bits of blue sky sprinkled with stars to make a ceiling, or cherubs to roost in suitable spaces, the Englishman dispenses with these decorations. Not so the gay Gaul. Whatever he can decorate he decorates. He knows the beautiful and loves it. He would have his garlands real if he could, but as he cannot, he gets out his paints and makes him a remembrancer. Happily for him, he is child enough to see the reality in the intention. An Englishman in his place might aspire to a reminiscence of Fragonard, or somebody of whom the Frenchman never thinks. He goes beyond. His remembrancer is to be of beauty itself, not of any particular other man's idea of beauty. So the sides of these arbours were festooned with flowers, garlands of flowers, baskets of flowers, trellises covered with flowers, with ribbons entwined, and cupids rioting among them; and here the exiled owner had sat and gazed and thought of flowers, felt and smelt them, and, all enwrapped in the joy with which the heart is strengthened in contemplation of the beauty of a flower, was spirited away to France.

But English people who came unprepared to enjoy themselves, but keen to criticise, as is their wont, when they entered these arbours set them down as "very French," without meaning to be complimentary.

2

Among the French *émigrés* who fled from the Terror was one who escaped in a suit of clothes lent him by his steward, and

with a small carpet bag in which was a little money and a few necessaries. He left large possessions, among which were jewels of great value, portable property had there been time to save it. Unfortunately, there was no time to save anything but his life.

This gentleman arrived in England, and lived for many months in great poverty and his servant's suit of clothes. He was a gay and gallant young man, who never shunned his equals for want of a dress suit. On the contrary, he fed his wit on the dilapidations of his dress. He washed and brushed his only suit, darned and patched it, and boasted of it as the most costly one in the world; for he had no doubt but that his *intendant* who had given it to him had recouped himself for the loss with the family jewels. In this he wronged an honest man. The steward secured the jewels and concealed them, but not for himself. As soon as it was possible to escape with them, he came to England and delivered them to his master, whose fortunes he continued to share in the honourable position of body-servant until the evil days were past. The master was one of the fortunates who recovered their property and returned to France. The valet, having captured the heart of an attractive young Englishwoman by his manners, which were as polished as his lord's, stayed behind, married, and settled in the red brick house which was the property of his wife. His master having expressed his gratitude with a handsome gift of money, he found himself with means sufficient to live in a very comfortable position as a "retired gentleman." It was he who laid out the grounds, and built and painted the arbours, making a little France for himself, in exile, wherein he lived out his days in the illusion very happily. His name was Armand Bosc, and the place, which had been called "The Grove," was renamed in his honour "The Bosquet." He came of well-to-do peasant proprietors. His only child, Roland Bosc, who was half an Englishman, studied law, entered the firm of Blimber and Screen, married Miss Blimber, was made a partner in the firm, became the father of Aloysius, and died young, much respected.

Such was the ancestry of our Mr. Aloysius Blimber Bosc, and an honourable ancestry too, with the noble inheritance of integrity which had descended to him in tail from his forbears on both sides.

The Bosquet was his mother's property for life, and there

mother and son abode together, Mr. Bosc being still unmarried. It was his mother's fault that he had not married; she made him too comfortable.

3

Mr. Bosc was late for dinner on the evening of Ella's arrival. This was such an unusual circumstance that his mother was vexed. Had he been habitually unpunctual, she would have ordered domestic matters accordingly, and met the irregularity as a regular thing, without worrying about it. As it was, her expectation being in the opposite direction, an occasional lapse put her out. She did not show it, however. She was educated in France, and had there acquired all the virtues of a French *bourgeoise,* including the pre-eminent virtue of tact; therefore she did not risk spoiling the man's dinner by "having it out with him" the moment he arrived, as is the unpleasant custom of a plentiful sort of woman on this side of the Channel. There is a time for everything, and things must be done pleasantly as well as decently and in order, if they are to be done to the best advantage. Mrs. Bosc knew better than to spoil two pleasures by taking the wrong one first. It was a pleasure to see Aloysius enjoy a good dinner, and it was also a pleasure to "have it out" with him when necessary. Dinner first, then. And it was a good dinner. Mrs. Bosc's gorge would have risen at the bare mention of "boiled mutton and trimmings," or of a naked gory joint of the "roast beef of Old England" kind, or other such messes of huge bulk as appeal to the uncultivated palate of our gluttonous people. A Sampson Brass might have revelled in such fare, but to have expected Mr. Bosc to stomach it would have been as great an offence as to have accused him of the professional methods of his Dickens colleague. From the *consommé* to the *café* all was delicately appetising both to the eye and palate. But it was a dinner such as, in a modest household, can only be procured by the mistress who knows how to cook and serve it herself. Mrs. Bosc was such a mistress. The fine art of housekeeping in all its branches had been a part of her education. She could have done the work of any one of her servants, and indeed the whole four of them at a pinch, with a finish not often attained in an English middle-class household.

Mrs. Bosc sat in the drawing-room waiting for Aloysius. She

had her eyes on the newspaper, and her ears open to hear him arrive. When at last he appeared, carefully dressed for the evening, and three-quarters of an hour late, she received him with a smile, put down the paper, and carefully abstained from looking at the clock. She had looked at it when she heard his foot on the stairs.

Dinner being immediately announced, he offered her his arm.

"I see," she said, on the way to the dining-room, "that London is unusually full for the beginning of the season."

"I observed the fact myself this afternoon," he answered, punctuating his sentences with a twitch of his nose. "Blocks in the traffic were incessant, there was such a crowd of vehicles in the main thoroughfares."

The conversation continued on these impersonal lines.

If Mr. Bosc could have been fattened, his mother's dinners would have fattened him. He said so himself, almost every day when the coffee was served and the maid had withdrawn. It was his grace after meat, and only omitted under unusual circumstances. This evening he failed to pay his mother the usual tribute. She noticed, too, that he helped himself absently, taking *rougets à la sauce verte* without remark, almost passing *cailles bardées, roties* and *cresson de fontaine,* leaving the *légumes* which were *petits-pois à la ménagère,* the first of the season, and only toying with his favourite *tourtelettes aux fraises,* as if he did not know what he had on his plate.

He roused himself, however, when the coffee was served. At this period of the proceedings it was his mother's habit to make a move, as if she were about to retire, and it was his habit to exclaim: "You will stay and smoke a cigarette with me!"

He gave the phrase with more than the usual animation this evening, and she made the invariable rejoinder, "I will stay and see you smoke one," with more than her usual decision.

Mr. Bosc rose, drew an armchair forward, waited until she had seated herself, and then said, suiting the action to the word: "Now, a footstool, I think. And the little table with your knitting. And your coffee."

When she had said: "Thank you, my dear," he returned to his own seat, lit a cigar, poured himself out a glass of wine, found the easiest position for his length and leanness, blinked, and twitched his nose. This last action had the effect of a finale to the rites peculiar to the occasion.

4

Now was their most intimate hour, when barriers of reserve were removed by the bland influence of good food, easy of digestion. The time had come, and Mrs. Bosc began:

"You were late this evening, my son," she remarked, between two sips of coffee. "I feared the *cailles* would be spoilt. Really," she took up her knitting and counted a few stitches—"it made me quite anxious." A less discreet woman would have asked "What were you doing?" but Mrs. Bosc knew that the questions not asked are the oftenest answered in full.

"The *caille* was excellent," said Mr. Bosc, holding his wine to the light, and looking at it.

Then Mrs. Bosc knew that the occasion of his unpunctuality was important. He would have mentioned a trifling matter at once. She recollected his allusion to the crowded traffic. He must have been in the thick of it, or he would not have known of the blocks. There was never much traffic on his route from the office home, therefore something had taken him away from the office. Mrs. Bosc intended to know what that something was, and Mr. Bosc, reasoning by induction, was quite aware of the intention, also he meant to humour her; in fact, he had to humour her now for his own purpose, but he was not one to spoil sport.

She counted her stitches, and in the pause that ensued, he sat half turned from the table towards her, his cigar in one hand, the other toying with his wineglass, his long legs crossed, his eyes absently fixed on the toe of his shoe, a complaisant, ruminating expression on his face. Evidently he was thinking of something that had gratified him. Why this reticence?

"Dr. Grobeen paid me a visit this afternoon," she recommenced.

"My dear mother! you are not ill, are you?" he exclaimed.

"Oh no!" she answered, with obviously affected cheerfulness. "I imagined I wanted a tonic, but I was only a little depressed, I think, for I felt quite set up after our talk. All I wanted was rousing."

"I am afraid you are too much alone," he said with concern.

"Not a bit," she rejoined. "I like to be alone when I cannot have the best company. And who can always? And that is where the doctor steps in. The doctor has always something

to say that takes one out of oneself. His experience of life is so varied."

"Not more so than the lawyer," Aloysius replied, valiant for his profession. "The lawyer sees the imbroglio in progress, the doctor only comes in at intervals, generally towards the end. A lawyer should have enough to say——"

She saw her opportunity, and interrupted, "To take one out of oneself? He should have." She stifled a sigh. "I should think you must meet many interesting people."

He saw his opportunity and answered alertly: "Indeed, yes. Why, only to-day I had to meet a *protégée* of the Duchess of Castlefield Saye. At least, I thought it better to meet her myself."

"A young lady?"

"Young, yes. But not supposed to be a lady. From the Duchess's point of view, not at all. From the Duchess's point of view she is merely a girl who makes lace. From my point of view, meeting her as a man of the world and lawyer of experience, a lady in every attribute."

"This is interesting!" Mrs. Bosc exclaimed.

"Ha! ha! my dear mother! How stands the score between lawyer and doctor now, eh?"

"One for the lawyer, but can he keep it up?" the old lady answered astutely. She flattered herself that this acute lawyer was but a simple gentleman in his mother's hands.

The simple gentleman's nose twitched. His mother's innocent wiles amused him. It was part of the business of his life to take her out of herself, and, for the purpose, he would confide to her any secret of his office that might be confided to the whole world. Also he would consult her on occasion. There were times when her woman's point of view was invaluable, and he was glad of her advice. He could trust her, too. Her indiscreetness went no further than her desire to know. It was from her that he had inherited his own eminent discretion.

"The doctor has the advantage of the lawyer in this," he pleaded, "his cases are generally matters of life and death. There is little pathos in legal perplexities as a rule. Our one chance in common is to be found in the humours of our clients. But my case to-day has several claims to be interesting. A young girl, Ella Banks by name, the daughter of a tenant farmer in a small way on the Pointz estate, attracted the notice of the Duchess of Castlefield Saye by her very beautiful lace work.

It appears that she has discovered secrets of design which were supposed to have been lost, and she has, all unaided, practically revived the art which had very much degenerated in her own neighbourhood, by gratuitous teaching. Finding that the lace-makers were sweated by the wholesale dealers, she conceived the idea of having a headquarter house in London which should pay the workers an equitable living wage, and where the lace could be vended by herself retail. The Duchess heard of this project, and appealed to the Duke to patronise it. The Duke approved, but on condition that the Duchess herself should do the patronage. The Duchess agreed, but with the proviso that she should have no trouble in the matter. Accordingly the trouble was put upon me. A house was set apart for the business, and I was commissioned to make all the arrangements. There is to be an exhibition of lace to launch the project. The Duchess has consented either to open the exhibition herself or to get some even more distinguished personage to open it. Miss Ella Banks came to London to-day, and for the future will be in residence as head of the whole concern. I am given *carte blanche* to carry out her ideas in every practicable particular!"

"She will never make such an enterprise pay!" the old lady exclaimed.

"That, my dear mother"—Mr. Bosc carefully flicked the ash from the end of his cigar—"is not the object of the enterprise."

"Then what on earth *is* the object of the enterprise?" the old lady required to be told.

"The object of the enterprise, primarily, so far as I can judge, is to provide congenial occupation for an extremely interesting young woman."

"Do you mean to tell me, Aloysius," his mother demanded in a scandalised tone, "that the Duchess has set this young woman up in this extravagant manner for such a purpose?"

"No, my dear mother," was the deliberate reply. "I do not tell you that—exactly. That is only my hypothesis. Things are seldom so simple as that; there are always wheels within wheels; but they are not all whirling at once; if they were, we could not see any of them."

Mrs. Bosc, beguiled from the point by the apparent profundity of this cryptic utterance, nodded her appreciation of her son's cleverness.

Mr. Bosc uncrossed his long legs and recrossed them in the opposite direction, as though comfort required a change of

position. "All that I can tell you definitely is that the Duchess, for reasons which doubtless appear to her to be good and sufficient, favours the project to the extent I have indicated. Ample means have been placed in my hands. Anything in reason the young woman asks for she is to have."

"She is to have *carte blanche* to squander money, then!"

"So I supposed myself, I confess, until I made her acquaintance. It would have amounted to that in the case of most young women. But this one I conceive to be of a discretion——!" he raised his hands, palms outwards, to indicate the inexpressible. "I perceived, in our interview this afternoon, that she has no inclination to spend recklessly. She appreciates that part of her obligation to the Duchess is only to be acknowledged with gratitude; but the other, the pecuniary part, she will set herself to repay, or I shall be much surprised. I foresee that difficulties will arise from this peculiarity of hers——"

"Peculiarity! My dear son, what are you saying? Common honesty——"

"Yes," he interrupted, "it would be common honesty if repayment were required. It is not. She is to be set up regardless of expense. My difficulty, I believe, will be to persuade her to spend. But her inexperience should help me there. She does not know the cost of things. Had she known I am pretty sure that I should never have been able to persuade her to launch out on the scale upon which my client insists."

"The Duchess is mad, I think," Mrs. Bosc decided.

"Oh, my dear mother, who can account for the caprices of Duchesses with——"

"More money than sense," the old lady grumped.

"Well, of course——!" Mr. Bosc expressed anything she liked with a shrug, and carefully poured himself out exactly half a glass of claret.

"Why did you meet this young woman yourself?" his mother asked.

"As a precaution," he answered. "It is best to know what sort of person one has to deal with."

"What is she like?"

"I cannot tell you. She talked a good deal, but personality may conceal itself under a flow of words."

"But in appearance," his mother interrupted impatiently.

"A very noble-looking young woman," he replied.

The old lady frowned upon her knitting intently, and there

was a considerable pause, during which Mr. Bosc sat twirling his wineglass.

"You said the object, so far as you could judge," his mother observed at last, "was, *primarily*—— What do you suppose it to be *secondarily*?"

"Education," he said. "She lacks experience—knowledge of the world——"

"The less she knows of the world——"

"The greater her danger," Mr. Bosc interrupted.

"Times have changed——" the old lady was beginning.

"For the better, my dear mother, for the better," he again caught her up.

"You are an optimist, Aloysius."

"I am an observer, my dear mother."

"Then I hope your observation has taught you that a 'very *noble*-looking young woman' in London, in a conspicuous position, and without experience, left to herself quite unprotected——"

Mr. Bosc raised his hand to stop her.

"My dear mother," he said, "trust me. That young woman will not be unprotected."

His mother looked at him a moment shrewdly.

"She is not a Catholic, I should suppose," she queried.

"I should suppose not."

"A pity. We guard our girls."

"And other people's girls too, when we can," he reminded her.

"True," she said, and relapsed into thought. From this absence she emerged presently, very wide awake. "So," she said, "you, a bachelor lawyer, are to be head adviser to this young woman!"

"Excuse me," he said. "I am aware of my limitations. This is a case for two heads, and I want to consult you. I want to ask your advice, the advice of a mother. Here is a young woman friendless in London——"

"But, surely, a *protégée* of the Duchess!" Mrs. Bosc interrupted.

"Of the Duchess, yes," said Mr. Bosc, "so far as she goes."

Then Mrs. Bosc perceived that the lawyer had more in his mind than he could honourably mention. She put down her knitting. "What can I do to help you, Aloysius?" she said.

Mr. Bosc ceased toying with his wineglass, moved his chair so as to face her fully, and bent forward, as was his habit when

discussing specially confidential matters with a client. "The advice of a mother," he repeated. "What this young girl should have is a high-principled, experienced, sensible woman of the world *in loco parentis.*"

The little old lady's dark eyes were cast down, her ear turned to him, but she made no sign.

"The position is a dangerous one," Mr. Bosc pursued. "She should be put on her guard. Hints are not sufficient. It is a time to speak out. And that is precisely what I, as a man and a bachelor, cannot in any delicacy do."

Mrs. Bosc nodded comprehension and agreement.

"What is your plan?" she asked. "Where do I come in?"

"There are things this young lady will want and must have which I, a man and a bachelor, know of only vaguely," he answered indirectly. "Dress, for instance. And a dressmaker. There you come in. I have, in fact, promised my client the advantage, subject to your consent, of your admirable French taste and good sense in all such matters."

"I see," she said. "That gives me an opening."

"If you could make it convenient to go to her to-morrow morning. She is prepared to receive you."

Mrs. Bosc folded up her knitting, and packed it away in her work-basket with extreme precision. "I will go," she said.

Then Mr. Bosc straightened himself, and became genial, like a man greatly relieved.

CHAPTER III

ELLA INSTALLED

1

Mr. Bosc had been right in one respect. Ella had not fully comprehended at first. Great reverses, whether painful or pleasurable, have this in common for their immediate effect: they stun. And this was a reverse for Ella, the reverse of all that she had anticipated. She had had personal experience of the canniness for which the Duchess of Castlefield Saye was renowned. A little shop in a side street, with little in it, and only her own wits for capital to depend upon, was all that she was prepared for; and even her ready apprehension could not

adjust itself all in a moment to a difference so great. She had listened, spoken, acted, as we do in dreams, conscious of what is happening and true to ourselves, yet at the same time aware that we are dreaming; and it was not until she was shut up in her own room that night, that she managed to collect herself sufficiently to appreciate the reality of the experience.

No sanguine anticipation of the future ever made Ella careless of the present. She had learnt from her lacemaking that a mistake in a single stitch was enough to spoil the whole design, and this had taught her the value of attention to detail. She had inspected the whole of the house from the highest attic to the lowest cellar, and had mastered its every possibility, before she dismissed Mrs. Pounce.

When at last she retired for the night to the bedroom it had pleased her to take for herself, the one, as it happened, that Mr. Bosc had assigned to her, the lately deceased Lady Alicia Brabant's own room, bathroom and dressing-room, she turned the lights full on and looked about her. Never in her life had she been so lodged, yet she felt no strangeness. The atmosphere of the lady whose taste the house reflected was in every way congenial, and it was as if she found herself at home again and in comfort after an experience of roughing it abroad. On the writing-table was a sealed packet which contained keys, each with a label attached, and a note from Mr. Bosc. The note informed her that the contents of the drawers, cupboards, and wardrobes, to which these keys belonged, were hers. A list of the contents was enclosed. She read it carefully. It was headed: "Lace, wearing apparel, and jewels, late the property of the Lady Alicia Brabant."

Ella laid down the list, took off her dress, and let down her long black tresses. She had need to recover herself, and this everyday action helped her.

For a while she sat brushing her hair, then she rose and lighted a candle. Mrs. Pounce had pointed out to her a portrait of the Lady Alicia in one of the drawing-rooms, and Ella was suddenly seized with a desire to see it again. It was an oil painting, kit-cat, done by a good man. The lady was slender as Ella herself, and not much older. She wore an evening dress of sombre black relieved with *berthe* and *engageantes* of fine lace, and a handsome necklet of amethysts. Ella, holding the candle aloft, looked long at the portrait, and the portrait seemed to be looking at her, gravely and kindly. It was an attractive,

well-bred face, but not beautiful. She might have been known for a Brabant by her small, dark head, clear-cut features, and fine transparent skin. Ella perceived a family likeness to Lord Melton, the present heir to the dukedom.

"I wish I had known you," she said aloud, apostrophising the picture; "you would have been my friend." And as if from the picture in answer there came into her mind the words: "Am I not your friend?"

As she returned to her own room, it seemed to Ella that the old house was fragrant with the atmosphere of gentle women. She was conscious of shadowy forms hovering in the darkness just beyond the circle of light shed by her feeble candle. Half shrinking she peered about her. "Be good to me!" she whispered. "Help me! Protect me!"

2

Making for the dressing-table in her bedroom, as women often do when they are perturbed, she saw herself, full length, float past the mirror in the wardrobe, her splendid hair a sable cloud about her—a vision to inspire a woman with confidence in herself. What protection did she need but her own good sense and steadfast purpose? But it was inevitable that she should feel some uneasiness. There was much in the position she found herself placed in that required explanation. The Duchess was not given to lavish expenditure on anybody at any time, yet Ella's project was being carried out regardless of expense. The Duchess must have some special reason for this; what was it? Thinking the matter over now, Ella found a reason that satisfied her. If the Duchess suspected that Lord Melton, her eldest son, was in love with a lacemaker, what more natural than that she should do her best to separate them? Lord Melton had gone abroad on a sudden with the intention, it was said, of travelling for a year or two. He had taken no leave of Ella, and had had no such intention, she was sure, the last time she saw him. Duchesses do not maltreat workgirls nowadays even if they suspect that their eldest sons are in love with them; but they might very likely send their sons voyaging round the world out of the way, and set the workgirls up in business in London, to tempt and to be tempted. Ella concluded that her removal was a well thought out maneuvre, of which Ursula Pratt was

the instigator, and not an unkindly one. Nothing could be unkindly that Mrs. Pratt had a hand in. Mrs. Pratt knew of Ella's project with regard to the shop in London; they had often discussed it; and Mrs. Pratt favoured the scheme. Mrs. Pratt was the Duchess's dearest friend, the one to whom she would naturally confide her suspicion with regard to Melton and Ella, the one on whose advice she would implicitly rely. Mrs. Pratt had been kindness itself to Ella, and would certainly consider her interests as well as the Duchess's. The lace shop evidently offered an opportunity to combine the two, and the best thing for both would be to get Ella married before Lord Melton returned from his travels. In an assured position and an attractive setting the well-protected *protégée* of the Duchess would be bound to receive honourable attention, and her exceptional beauty would secure her offers of marriage from suitors desirable enough to satisfy her ambition. Mrs. Pratt vouched for her friend, the Duchess, as good-natured if not very wise. She would certainly wish no harm to Ella, and might easily be persuaded to favour a project which promised to relieve her anxiety in a manner satisfactory to them both. Ella, considering the matter from the Duchess's point of view, found the plan excellently suited for the purpose. She allowed also that the purpose was generous, and that she ought to be grateful. She decided to be grateful, but without being compliant. She had entered into no undertaking. It was understood, of course, that she should do her duty by the commercial part of the enterprise; but, apart from that, she had her own object and would make for it direct. The whole thing seemed plain enough to her now as she thought it over, and, coming to the conclusion that there was nothing to trouble about, she determined to let it stand at that, and to make the most of her many advantages.

3

Following upon this determination her spirits rose to the height from which it is joy to look. She opened the window and leant out. With the opening of the window she let in a muffled roar, like the roar of the sea in a shell. It was as if she held London to her ear and listened—London, the city joyous of her dreams!

A band passed in the distance playing a rollicking march, and

her heart, throbbing to the throbbing of the drum, swelled high with hope. Then there were the feet—pattering feet coming, coming, coming from every direction; and going, going, going again, in every direction. The feet were most strange and exciting to her unaccustomed ear—footfalls of such numbers of people as it was hard to believe existed, each pursuing an object, and what object? Perhaps that great glow in the sky was the glory to which they were hurrying, to bathe in it, and from which they were returning all radiant and fresh. Joy was the predominant note to Ella's ear. Only the fulness of life appealed to her at that moment, with an ecstatic sense of well-being. Those feet! those feet! messenger feet! *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings.* . . . They were coming into her life, those feet, bringing her joy!

But amidst the tumult of sound in which she detected nothing but gladness, a discordant something was impressing itself on her memory, because it discounted her pleasure; a something to which her mind refused its attention for the moment. During the long hours of the night, however, when exultation was giving place to the inevitable reaction, and she lay awake, forced to listen when she would fain have slept, it was about this something that her imagination played in a vain effort to interpret it. She was conscious of it as an undertone, full of foreboding. Suppose——

But, no, what nonsense! She would not suppose. She could take care of herself. The song at her heart was a song of gladness, full of promise; and this spectre of a foreboding—warning, threat—what was it? An effect of physical fatigue! Ella had determined not to trouble. Now she determined not to be troubled. She sprang out of bed and closed the window; and, in the silence that succeeded, at last she slept.

4

The morning brought Mrs. Bosc, and Ella went forward to receive her. Mrs. Bosc held out her hand and looked up at Ella, Ella took the hand in hers deliberately, and looked down at Mrs. Bosc. They were a surprise to each other. Mrs. Bosc had expected something like the Venus of Milo, badly become by an incongruous, ill-made modern dress. She saw elegance

for which she had no adjective, modern elegance, simply attired, but suitably.

Ella had expected a female Mr. Bosc. She saw a compact little lady, dressed in black with a touch of white, a perfect costume, in keeping with her age and the time of day, but deceptive in its demure restraint to an eye unacquainted with the fastidious niceties of cut and material which go to pile up the cost of such quietness. A certain hardness about Mrs. Bosc's mouth contradicted the indication of her soft brown eyes, but, taken together, eyes and mouth did not disagree. She was like a well-mixed salad, with oil and vinegar just in the right proportions, but bland malt vinegar, not the tart acetic acid variety, which sets the teeth on edge.

"My son thought I could be of use to you," she said.

"You are very kind," Ella answered. "Please sit down. Do you like a low chair? This one is comfortable."

As she took her seat Mrs. Bosc mentally ticked off to Ella's credit the essentially ladylike qualities of ease, grace, and consideration.

"So you have come to London adventuring," Mrs. Bosc began.

Ella reflected a moment. "I have not been thinking of myself as an adventuress," she replied.

Mrs. Bosc dismissed the ill-omened word with a gesture. "There is adventuring and adventuring," she said, "and yours is the high emprise, I understand."

"May it prove so!" Ella exclaimed.

"Amen," the old lady answered comfortably. "And now about your dress, my dear." She settled herself and smiled, prepared to enjoy the theme. "There are plenty of good things to be had ready-made if you are in a hurry."

"The dresses I have seen and liked were not ready-made," Ella objected.

"Oh! you have been getting your eye in already?"

"My eye should be in, to a certain extent," Ella replied. "There were ladies in my neighbourhood who knew how to dress, and I once saw an American."

"What was the peculiarity of the American lady's dress?" Mrs. Bosc asked with interest.

"That there was no peculiarity—nothing to note in particular. There was an unbroken effect. I have always remembered her as the best-dressed woman I ever saw, yet I could not

tell what she wore. And now—please excuse me—now I see you."

"My dear!" the old lady exclaimed, much pleased. "An unbroken effect—that is your idea? And the other ladies you spoke of? You admired their taste?"

"In some things. In others it showed me what to avoid. There was the Duchess—all odds and ends of ribbons and lace. And Lady Ann Brabant—dowdy in whatever she wore. And Lena Kedlock—she has her dresses made in Paris."

"Ah! then they were charming, doubtless," Mrs. Bosc exclaimed with approval.

"Charming for her, and characteristic. They expressed Lena Kedlock, but they would not express me."

"I don't quite understand, my dear?" Mrs. Bosc questioned.

"Life for Lena Kedlock is the emotion of the moment," Ella explained. "To me life is a big business which I intend to bring to a successful issue. My dress must further my object. Now do you see?"

Mrs. Bosc stared at her blankly. She did not see; how could she? She had never thought of dress as anything but a decent covering for the body, which should be suitable, and might be beautiful. She regarded it as an expression of taste; as an expression of character and purpose it did not exist for her.

"Well, my dear," she observed, after casting about in her mind for something to say, "you will require a very special kind of dressmaker. I hardly know——"

"I know," Ella took her up, smiling. "I require one who is accustomed to dress women of taste, and who will do what I tell her."

"There are some such, of course—very expensive," Mrs. Bosc answered dubiously.

"It will not be extravagant in the long run," Ella assured her, "because the dresses I shall order will always be suitable for my purpose, and last."

"The fashions change so quickly," Mrs. Bosc objected.

"Not in my case," Ella replied. "My requirements will be individual. Individual taste mocks at the incessant dictates of the fashion-monger."

"My dear," said Mrs. Bosc, smiling, "may I ask how you, living in the depths of the country, have learnt so much?"

Ella's answering smile was winning. "I have one friend in the depths of the country, Mrs. Pratt, an Austrian lady of high

birth, married to an English yeoman. The Duke thinks Mrs. Pratt perfect. He says there is nothing about her that he would have otherwise."

"Then you know the Duke?"

"Oh yes." Ella answered off-hand, setting the Duke aside as not to the point. "Mrs. Pratt has been very good to me. She has taught me many things. And her dress is individual and beautiful."

"Then do you mean to dress like Mrs. Pratt?"

"Alas, it would ill become me!" Ella answered. "I am not perfect."

Mrs. Bosc searched the room with her eyes—walls, floor, and ceiling—for inspiration. "I should think Madame Marigold would be the right person," she said at last. "She is one of those who won't put things in the window. Her clients seem to be fastidious. I asked her the other day if Lovelace and Pryn were a good place for gloves, and she said, 'I know nothing about the shop, madame. My ladies do not go to such emporiums. They buy nothing from people who advertise!'"

Mrs. Bosc expected Ella to smile at this anecdote, but she only nodded gravely. "That is the kind of woman I want," she said. "Let us send for Madame Marigold."

"Or go to her," Mrs. Bosc suggested.

"If she is really my kind of dressmaker she is accustomed to wait on her clients," Ella rejoined, and clinched the matter. "But I should like to see the shops if you would be so good as to take me," she added. "I shall perhaps require other things, and should like to know where to get them best."

The "perhaps" puzzled Mrs. Bosc. Ella was thinking of Lady Alicia's wardrobe, which she had peeped at that morning and judged to be more than ample.

Beveridge came in at this moment and announced that the coachman had come for orders. Ella looked placidly at Mrs. Bosc.

"I am quite ready, my dear," Mrs. Bosc said.

"Then, if you will excuse me, I will dress," Ella answered, and was about to leave the room.

Mrs. Bosc detained her. "The carriage, my dear," she said. "You have given no order. Hadn't you better say at once?" Then, to relieve Ella's shyness, she gave Beveridge the order herself. When he had gone, she remarked, smiling: "You

must learn to order confidently, my dear. You will soon get used to it. The man will come every day for orders."

"Really, it is too much!" Ella exclaimed.

Mrs. Bosc smiled on her complacently. "A carriage is a great help," she said. "You will require one. It will get you through your business in half the time, and at much less expenditure of strength. So make the most of it, and be thankful."

"Oh, don't doubt my gratitude!" Ella entreated.

"I don't, my dear," Mrs. Bosc assured her. "But I should doubt your good sense if I found you hesitating to take full advantage of any offer of help that comes to you."

And again Mrs. Bosc smiled at her complacently, as a mother might smile in pride at a beautiful daughter. The mothering of Ella Banks was already much to her mind.

Before the shopping was over Mrs. Bosc concluded that her son was mistaken in one of his surmises. He seemed to have fallen into the common masculine error of attributing to an attractive young woman the qualities with which he would most have admired to see her endowed. Ella showed no reluctance to spend.

"Spun silk!" Mrs. Bosc exclaimed afterwards, when recounting the day's proceedings to Aloysius. "Spun silk for——" she searched for a desirable word to indicate garments of too intimate a description to mention precisely, and found "underwear." "Spun silk for underwear? No, indeed! Pure silk, my dear! Nothing but the best of everything for a——"

"Now, don't say beggar-on-horseback, my dear mother," Mr. Bosc remonstrated.

"I won't," his mother conceded. "All the same, I don't know what to say. If one is not on one's guard, one's judgment may be obscured. The girl is fascinating."

"An exceptional young woman," Mr. Bosc suggested.

"Well," she answered dubiously, "in that, at all events, you are right."

CHAPTER IV

THE DUCHESS CONVINCED AGAINST HER WILL

1

THE Duchess of Castlefield Saye and her daughter, the Lady Ann Brabant, were returning from the State Ball. The big

carriage, hung high on strap and spring, swayed gently to the rhythmic beat of the horses' hoofs—flying hoofs of as fine a pair of horses as this or any other country can produce. The night was far spent, and both ladies were tired enough to be conscious of the ease of soft cushions and yielding springs. The mind of each was busy reviewing the happenings of the night, altogether pleasant happenings for these two; for they were guileless ladies, unsuspicious of anything that did not appear distinctly on the surface, and at a State Ball very little appears on the surface that is not all smiling grace and courtliness. Royalty had been more than gracious on this occasion, it had been specially friendly and attentive; and the delicate little Dresden china Lady Ann had been admired to the extent of several dances with the highest Highnesses. Both ladies would certainly have slept upon the event in the best of humours but for one of those potent trifles which irrelevantly jerk the mind from one train of thought to another with irritating abruptness, the irritation doubtless influencing the direction to a suitable subject. The jerk on this occasion was actual; its cause a sudden swerve and check of the carriage, violent enough, at the rate at which they were going, to unseat the ladies, and bring them to their knees in a heap on the floor. To one whose habitual walk in life is cleared as a rule of everything discomposing, such an occurrence is an upset in every sense of the word. The Duchess's dignity suffered as well as her equilibrium, and although before she had recovered her seat they were bowling along again as rapidly and smoothly as such a perfect equipage could bowl, she did not recover her equanimity.

"What on earth is Coulson doing?" she exclaimed.

"There was something in the way. It got in the way," the tender little Lady Ann explained, in defence of the culprit.

"Got in the way! How wrong of it," said the Duchess.

"You are not hurt, mother darling?" Lady Ann asked anxiously.

"I don't know," said the Duchess. "I can't be thrown about like that without feeling it. And you too. Your dear father really must inquire into this. Things cannot be allowed to get in the way. It is contrary to—contrary to the liberty of the subject," she concluded, picking up a phrase which had lately caught her attention without conveying any special meaning.

"Perhaps Coulson was going too fast," Lady Ann ventured.

"Coulson never goes too fast," the Duchess declared. "He

was born on our property, and brought up in our stables. When somebody said he was an ideal coachman for a duchess, somebody else said he was an ideal coachman for a queen. I remember perfectly, because I thought at the time it was the sort of way clever people say things in books. How could Coulson drive too fast?"

2

The carriage swayed as restfully as a yacht on a windless sea. The Duchess's diamonds sparkling in the lamplight, claimed kindred with the myriad stars in the clear night sky. The air entering by the open window was just crisp enough to be reviving. Every influence of the moment was restorative, yet the Duchess did not recover her equanimity. The smiling amenities of the State Ball recurred to her no more. Her mind had been jerked on to the war path, and was arming to attack.

"There's that tiresome girl to-morrow," she burst out abruptly.

"To-day, is it not?" Lady Ann replied, mindful of the hour.

"To-day, or to-morrow, what does it matter? You know what I mean," her mother reproved her querulously. "Anyway, there's that tiresome girl. Your dear father's really rather—— But of course he means it all so well. He is so very good and kind."

"It won't be a long business, mother dear," Lady Ann reminded her for her comfort. "Why, you take no time to open a bazaar with crowds of things in it, and the good purpose you have to talk about. There will only be lace in Ella Banks' exhibition, and no purpose at all worth mentioning."

"It isn't the time it will take," said the Duchess; "it is——"

It was because she "had a feeling about Ella Banks," as she expressed it to Ursula Pratt. "I don't know," she once said, "I can't explain. But there it is. She affects me like a disturbance in the atmosphere before a thunderstorm. You know how you feel. There is something threatening—something to fear."

Nevertheless, in spite of the prejudice, which the Duke did not share, here she was committed to advertise Ella Banks as her *protégée*. Acting on the advice of Ursula Pratt, she had brought this about herself. She had told the Duke about Ella's idea of a shop in London, and the Duke had said it would be nice of her to help the girl. She had objected to the trouble, and he had replied that the whole matter could be arranged without troubling her, only she must take the credit. This part of the

compact had been strictly kept. She had not even been told what arrangements had been made. But about the opening by which she was to make public profession of her patronage, which was her part of the compact, it had been necessary to trouble her, and to-morrow the Exhibition was to be opened by a Royal Princess, whom she was to attend on the occasion. She had been for excusing herself, but the Duke overcame her reluctance. "Just to give her a start, my dear," he said. "Quite a good work, you know. Things are always uphill for women whatever their rank."

This diversion from the particular to the general was as efficacious as it was tactful. The Duchess, being very woman, had felt the uphill pull herself—physically. Her own back had ached, and she had not been spared by her high estate from the performance of duties which cruelly taxed her strength. "True," she exclaimed, losing sight of Ella Banks in commiseration for her whole suffering sex. "It is always uphill work for a woman."

"But if you stood by each other, you know," the Duke suggested.

"Yes, of course," she vaguely agreed. "Quite beautiful, I am sure."

"Get one of your Royal Ladies to go and inspect her lace," he pursued. 'If it got into the papers that a Princess had exclaimed 'Exquisite!' the shop would succeed. All the middle-class ma'ams would follow suit."

"Why the middle-class ma'am, if you please?" said the Duchess, bridling. "I should have thought that *we* were the important people."

"Of course," the Duke replied. "But the middle-class ma'ams pay their bills."

The inference was lost upon the Duchess.

This conversation took place in the Duchess's sitting-room at Castlefield Saye, where, when he was in residence, the Duke habitually paid court to her every morning for half an hour—the longest half-hour of his day, the shortest of hers. But it was this half-hour of devotion that made the marriage a success. Before it was over the lady was ready to do anything to please her lord, and the difference of the moment, whatever it might be, was amicably settled to the satisfaction of both.

But the Duchess was more than usually difficult on this occasion. She had not given in when the half-hour was up, and the Duke, instead of departing with a pretty speech, as usual, sat

down and began to chat—first about the boys, and then about old times, most agreeable theme of all.

"That dress reminds me of one you wore when we were honeymooning in Italy," he said. "Do you remember?"

"Don't I remember, dearest!" she exclaimed. *"Don't* I remember!"

"Oh, those dresses!" he said. "Not to mention the dear little woman who wore them. The dresses, where are they? But the dear little woman—thank God!"

He kissed her hand. The little lady's heart expanded, her eyes became suffused.

He rose and walked about the room, humming the air of a duet they used to sing together in those days. Then, stopping abruptly in a half-finished phrase, he sighed.

"I must go, I suppose," he said. "I have to look into—Duty first, eh? No need to forget, though, all the same, eh? Well, I must go. *Addio, la bella Napoli!"*

The little duchess took up the strain. *"Addio! Addio!"* she sang softly, kissing the tips of her little plump fingers.

He was at the door. He paused with his hand on the handle. He seemed to think. "By the way," he began— "Oh, yes, I remember. I thought there was something I wanted to say. The lace shop, you know. Having put your hand to that plough, I am sure you will not turn back. I only wanted to remind you. To arrange. And about the Princess. The Princess is important. You know what Quintilian says: 'What princes do themselves, they engage others to do!'"

The Duchess was pleased to have him suppose that she knew what Quintilian said. Smiling and nodding, she acquiesced.

"Then that is settled," he concluded. "Really, it is very good of you. But then you always are good. Your example stimulates me. Ah! the power of good women! the influence! If only there were more like you! Influence—that is the woman's sceptre. By influence women mould the world."

The little Duchess felt the world being moulded under her influence, and drew herself up proudly.

"Well, I suppose I must go," he sighed, but he made some further show of reluctance to leave her. Then suddenly, as if he had summoned the courage, with an effort, he opened the door. *"Si conservi. A buon rivederci!"* he said, and kissed his hand, and was gone.

He left her persuaded.

But since then she had suffered a relapse of feeling, and as she alighted from her carriage that night after the State Ball—with her coronet all on one side—she was still politely anathematising Ella Banks and "the whole tiresome affair."

CHAPTER V

ELLA'S RETROSPECT

1

At that same hour the blinking stars in the clear dark of the night sky were shuttered out from the Corner House, but Ella was still about. In view of to-morrow, her opening day, and a great day for her, she was too excited to rest. For many a long day she had been preparing for the event. She had made lace, studied lace, thought in terms of lace, and toiled and suffered to win for lace the recognition which had raised far less lovely fabrics of art high in the estimation of the world. She had found the industry decadent save for some few sporadic attempts to revive it here and there, and was for placing it on a footing worthy of its ancient prestige. She came of generations of lacemakers, and had the art at her finger-ends. In any case, she must have made lace as the birds build and the beavers make their dams. But, in so far as she knew what she was doing, it was only by the way that she was attempting to revive a beautiful art. She was for bringing lace to life again, but less for its own sake than as the best means she had at hand to help her to other ends; yet it was rather as if lace had chosen her to revive it than as if she had chosen lace to carry out her projects. In either case the choice was good. No more splendid tenement could have been found for an abode by the Genius of Lace than Ella Banks; and for such purpose as hers—the ends which she envisaged—what could be better than lace? No fabric of art has been so intimately associated with every phase of human joy and sorrow as lace. The history of hundreds of years cannot be written without mention of it. Lace has contributed to the pomp of states, the magnificence of kings and queens, the beauty of women, the gallantry of men. It is the pride of the bridal, it decks the new-born babe, it is piously sacrificed to honour the beloved dead. The lover offers it in homage to his lady, his most

exquisite gift; the subject to his sovereign, the religious to their God. Woman has worked her way with lace to many an end, good and bad. She has used it shamelessly to expose her beauty and allure, and modestly to veil herself and hide behind. Many a precious morsel of incredible beauty, nun's work, the labour of a lifetime, inwrought with devotion, with prayer and praise and supplication, has been offered on the altar with the pathos of blinded eyes in mute appeal,—that, for the sight lost in the work and as a sign that the sacrifice is accepted and deemed worthy of reward, there may, for an ecstatic moment, be granted the Beatific Vision to the soul's seeing, a glimpse of the Glory.

The vision and the dream repose upon the past, and old lace is idealised by the associations that cling about it. Preserve the old lace with tender respect, but give us also the new! Why be looking back forever? Why put a period to beauty? Beauty is eternal as the seasons, it was and is and is to be. There is reality in the present and in the new. Vision and dream are for the mystic whose blood is cold, the barren mystic in whom endeavour centres on the salvation of his own soul. The warmth of those to whom life calls finds fuel in beauty renewed, in endless production, in the ever recurrent loveliness of ever recurrent springs. And here is beauty. Nature and art are married in lace, and ethic smiles upon the union. Here is beauty of nature reproduced in leaf and spray, in bud and bird and butterfly, in full-blown flower; beauty of women revealed and enhanced; beauty of mind engendered in endeavour, in refinement and taste; beauty of labour, of story, of song. Sing us the songs of needle and bobbin, tell us the stories; but not as of the past and gone. Let the tale continue. Let the new work inspire new songs, each more lofty of import than the last, songs of progress. Let the fairy fabric as of old, reflect the spirit of the age, of this new age, with its new dawning heroism of altruistic co-operation, of noble aspiration, of self-sacrificing love. Fashion our lace with sprigs of ivy for constancy, with garlands of olive for peace; and purify the bays; let no more bloodstains contaminate them; let them be kept to crown the hero who has done great deeds on the battlefield of Good against Evil, and won for mankind another inch upwards on the way to heaven.

2

Ella had a future before her glowing with possibilities. It was a big thing that she was engaged upon, and she knew it, but she did not know enough to trust to herself solely for the accomplishment of her purpose. Her experience of life had taught her that power is to the high-placed. She had been brought up under the thumb of the governing class. Her earliest outlook upon life was from the peasant's cottage in which she was born, her earliest lessons in the ways of the world and in self-defence had been taught her there by her mother's mother, a lacemaker, with whom—her mother having died at her birth—she remained until the old woman's death. There she had lived in poverty during the first most impressionable years of her life. At her grandmother's death she had perforce to make her home with her father, a struggling tenant farmer in a small way, and her stepmother. The house was small, the family already large, and Ella, as an addition to it and an extra expense, was an inconvenience. They were decent toiling people, living from hand to mouth, never full-fed and often half-starved, and Ella had suffered—suffered from her position as an encumbrance, which her stepmother had taken good care to make her feel, and from an innate sense of injustice, fostered by the contrasts of life daily presented to her.

But she did not flatter herself that opening an exhibition in London would do all that she desired. The exhibition was only a beginning. Like all the purposeful on whom success attends, there was nothing chaotic in her intentions. She knew what she wanted to be and to do and to have. She had chosen her goal, the way by which she should reach it was clearly mapped out in her mind, and her programme drawn up—subject to such accidents and alterations as are common to programmes. Instruments might not be satisfactory, performers might fail of their promises at the last moment; this she knew, and for this she was prepared, in so far as the recognition of possible difficulties could prepare her.

The interests of the poorly-paid lacemakers were her first consideration. She asked to be up and at the middleman who ground them down, and not only at the middleman, but at the greedy rich in general, and all oppressors of the poor. She was determined to make them pay somehow. At that time, like the

law of the land, and like most people when they have to deal with wrong-doers, she was all for punishing, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; she saw no more excellent way.

She was prepared to lay human foibles of every kind under contribution to further the success of her endeavours. She was relying on fashion, on the desire of the vulgar to outvie each other in extravagant display, on the impulse of the philanthropic to help in a cause which appealed to their benevolence, and on the effect of her own beauty at close quarters, used to persuade. She had had some experience of the power that lay in her beauty to mould the minds of mankind to her will, and up to a certain point she relied on herself, but not altogether. She did not appreciate the strength of her own personality, and could not see herself as entirely fitted to carry her schemes out in full, unaided. Permanent power in her experience was altogether a matter of means and position, and means and position she meant to have. Without a high place in the world as a fair field for the display of her beauty and the exercise of her personal power, she believed her efforts would be abortive. Means and position therefore she must have, and already of means and position she had a promising prospect. For if Lord Melton, eldest son of the Duke of Castlefield Saye, who had been lured abroad in order to get him out of the way of temptation, were of the same mind when he returned from his travels as before he set out, which was likely enough, since absence makes the heart grow fonder, she had reason to believe that the good ship "Love and Marriage" would soon be anchored in the offing, awaiting the rising of the tide—the tide of success, which sweeps aside the barriers of convention, and renders opposition futile. The Duchess would always oppose, of that she was certain, but little recked Ella of the Duchess. The Duke was her friend—at present. . . . But if he knew, would his attitude be the same? The question would obtrude at odd times, but Ella dismissed it with a shrug of her shoulders. It was the kind of thing that is best left in the lap of the gods.

3

Ella loved the hours of the night after her household had gone up to bed. It was then that the mansion seemed most her own, hers with all it contained, visible and invisible, its furnishments enriched by association, its traditions of a great family, its

secrets—all was in her keeping. She felt herself responsible, and was glad of the responsibility. She would be loyal to the house.

At night she often wandered about, examining the rooms, the furniture, the pictures, the china, the contents of antique cabinets, and all the miscellaneous objects of interest that had been accumulating in the house for a hundred years. Her feeling for the beautiful was innate, her perception and discrimination wonderful considering her heredity. She had come to London ignorant of every art but her own, yet her taste was never at fault. It baffled Mr. Bosc. He could not account for it in one who had no cultivated ancestors from whom she might have inherited taste.

To-night, while the Duchess, her patroness, was basking in the smiles of Royalty at the State Ball, ignorant as yet that it was in the Family Mansion—her own Dower House, she supposed, should she ever be a widow—that Ella Banks, whom she disliked and feared, had been installed, Ella, the usurper, was happily beguiling the time in her favourite pursuit. In view of to-morrow she was restless, she could not sleep. She had intended to go to bed early, so as to be fresh for next day; but when she was undressed she found herself too hopelessly wide awake to lie still. She had to do something to work off her superfluous energy. Trying on a new tea-gown, a white chiffony thing enriched with lace, and fresh from the dressmaker, beguiled some little time satisfactorily as a duty which must be done. Her mirror made duty a pleasure when she saw the effect. She appreciated her own loveliness at all times, but one long look was enough to-night; then she sat down facing an open window, and gave herself up, not to thought, but to feeling.

Londoners, whose ears are dulled by habit, would have called the side street quiet; but to this girl, fresh from country solitudes and with senses healthily acute, it was a hive of happy activity, in which every movement was audible and significant,—every movement, that is, which made it the City Joyous of her dreams, the city she had come to conquer. Misery had not come home to her here in the great wicked city as it had in the country. She had seen nothing of the misery, seen no evidence of anything but what she expected to see, the wealth and the luxury. She had always thought of London as a magnet which drew wealth to itself from all parts of the world. It was the City Golden to which so many she knew had fled to escape slow starvation, the place where money was made, the place to make

money. Always it made her glad to be in the thick of the swirling traffic, among the hurrying feet. She thought of the working people as all employed and all well rewarded for their toil; free from harassing uncertainty, joyfully making money, joyfully spending it, sowing in labour to reap in food and warmth and good clothing and rest, and, above all, in a human being's fair meed of pleasure. She pitied no one for having to work, she worked hard herself, and knew that there is pleasure in work under fair conditions, and she supposed that the richest city in the world would be fair and generous, and wise enough to see to it that the work on which its upkeep depended was done for it under the fairest conditions. Therefore her ears were not attuned as yet to any but the one note, the note of gladness.

As the night advanced the noises gradually diminished, the clatter of passing vehicles became less frequent, the footfalls on the pavement more occasional, but Ella was still conscious of sound,—of a sea of sound, the waves of which, breaking about her, washed up to her keen perception fragments of the life of the vast city, a many-voiced merriment; always and only merriment, the glad side of its life, the side triumphant which exhilarates.

4

She was roused at last from a happy stupor of sensation by an importunate thought. There was something she wanted to do. She wanted to have another look at a modest little bedroom near the top of the house. Her first impulse had been to take this bedroom for her own. Its prettiness appealed to her, and it would have been promotion from any she had ever occupied; but she decided against it, because Mrs. Pounce had to be subjugated. She must be made to understand that Ella was mistress of the house, and the way to make her understand was for Ella to take possession as a matter of course of the best accommodation that the house afforded.

But the modest little room interested her. She fancied it had been furnished for some one in particular, a girl, she was sure, and a fair young girl, whose complexion had been affectionately considered when the delicate colouring was chosen, the pinks and the blues. The colours were faded now, the chintzes and paper old-fashioned; it must have been many years since the

room was used. Why? And for what sentimental reason had it been left unchanged?

Standing in it now, with her candle held high, she saw what she had not noticed before. On the bed, under a dust-sheet, something was outlined; a hard, oblong object, unlike anything that was used on a bed.

Ella raised the dust-sheet and discovered a picture, the bust of a young girl, a flower of a girl, all pink and white and golden, with the bluest eyes; the very colouring with which the room had been made to tone. Her neck and shoulders were bare, but the rest of her bust was wrapped about in lace, which she was holding together with one beautiful hand.

"Oh, but you are lovely!" Ella exclaimed.

She put down the candle and examined the picture. She judged it to be good from the impression it made upon her, and it could not be old, the paint was too fresh; but there was nothing to fix the date. The hair might have been piled up so, and the little golden curls have escaped on forehead and neck, in any age. The lace, which was so exactly detailed that it was possible to give it a name, Ella judged to be old Flemish, but that was no clue. Plenty of old Flemish has been preserved in old families.

"But you can't be dead and gone long ago," Ella apostrophised the picture.

It was such a young face, and so guileless, it hurt her to think of it as dust and ashes; it hurt her to think of it as faded and old—yet the occupant of that room, if she were still alive, could no longer be young.

The beautiful eyes, looking straight into Ella's, moved her strangely, but not as Lady Alicia's eyes were wont to move her. Lady Alicia, she always felt, was straining to say something to her, something which it might be good but certainly not pleasant for her to hear. In Lady Alicia's presence she stood before a great lady, and felt herself only a peasant girl, but one to whom the great lady was kindly disposed, whom she was fain to protect.

This, too, might be a great lady; but there was love in her eyes, and love is a leveller. Ella felt love claimed her as an equal.

"You darling!" she exclaimed. "You shall keep me company. You shall be my friend, my chosen friend. . . . Do you mind? Are you too great a lady for that? No! I think not. Your

eyes are so kind, so trustful, so appealing, as if you wanted a friend yourself, some one strong and true that you could lean upon. And I am strong and true; come, lean upon me!"

She took the picture to her bedroom, and set it up on two chairs, provisionally, opposite to a long looking-glass. Kneeling beside it, she saw the reflection of herself and it, her own black hair and pearl-white skin in contrast to golden hair and warmer whiteness tinged with pink. For a moment she would have given her own noble beauty in exchange for this fair feminine loveliness. But only for a moment. There was no strength in this exquisite flower, this frail giver of delight; a breath would wither her, a blow would kill her. The battle is to the strong, and life is a battle.

Ella stood before the glass, drawn up to her full height, and smiled. She was not one to lean, no! She had come to conquer, and she was well equipped.

5

Her thoughts glanced to the morrow. She was still restless, she would go to her showroom and have a last look round.

Of all the rooms in the house, this—the ballroom—while it was empty, was the one that lured her oftenest. To her the whole house was haunted, but most of all the ballroom. Here the glamour of days gone by oftenest overcame her, and spectres of the past thronged thickest. It was as if she remembered the balls and the routs, and all the gay company that once assembled here. She was aware of beauty enhanced by the soft refining light of innumerable candles. She was aware of gallant gentlemen in satin and velvet and lace, and noble ladies tricked out with powder and patch, moving with high courtesy and studied gesture—the low bow, the deep curtsey, the courtly grace—in stately measures, pavane and minuet. Sometimes, shut up here alone, she had lost touch with reality, and, all unconsciously, mingling with the phantom company, to the rhythmic beat of phantom music, she had joined the dance with gliding steps, dropped the low curtsey, and smiled upon a phantom partner as to the manner born.

At such times it would have been easy to believe her the reincarnation of some lovely lady who had toyed with life on the spot some couple of hundred years before, and had recovered the recollection.

But to-night no ballroom beauty could have competed with her, the image was too recent and too small, a trivial fancy looking ludicrous beside the truth. As she moved about the room, taper in hand, lighting the candles for her last look round, her white robe trailing from her careless hold, she might have been a priestess of some strange cult, engaged in her avocation; or, later, as she sat on the daïs, a grand and solitary white figure, calmly contemplative, brooding on the scene before her, a pagan poet would have thought, "A goddess in her shrine!"

Ella never having seen an exhibition, had had neither experience to guide nor prejudice to hamper her in the arrangement of her Show. Affable Bosc, her able and obliging coadjutor, who had got up the subject of lace with the most lawyer-like care, as he would have got up the details of a case, and, lawyer-like, had more reliance on cut-and-dry precedent than on her innate perception of possibilities and of artistic values, had advised, but for the most part vainly, when he ventured to advise at all, which was only at the outset of the enterprise. Ella had ideas of her own on the subject of colour and display, and he soon found that the post assigned to him was to carry them out.

She had stood out against him about the lighting of the Show. He had been for installing the electric light; she scouted the notion.

"The electric light vulgarises everything," she said. "I notice that wherever I go. The heavy shadows it casts caricature the face. It shows everything at its worst. It robs even the most beautiful jewels of their sparkle and flash. There is no charm of mystery under the electric light, no poetry, nothing but the baldest prose."

"It could be subdued with shades," Mr. Bosc argued.

"But it could not be rendered beautiful by association," she rejoined.

"Here it is eighteenth century. I can't bear to think of any modern mixture. I must have wax in those lovely groups of candelabra on the walls, and in those great lustres hanging from the ceiling."

"Wax is very expensive," Mr. Bosc objected persuasively. Ella raised her eyebrows. She might have been an indulged daughter of the ducal house itself, so well did she convey her contempt for expense with a look. Mr. Bosc knew that look by this time, and gave in with a compliment.

"You are the Madame Gilbert of to-day," he said.

"Oh, but I'm much more," she answered gaily. "Madame Gilbert was only an agent of Mazarin's great secretary, Colbert. I am both originator and agent, Colbert and Gilbert rolled into one. . . . But will the courtiers come to my Show and strip it when the king retires, and who is to be king?"

"History repeats itself," he reminded her. "Royalty may again be inspired to patronise, and courtiers extravagant."

"But never again will gentlemen wear ruffles and *cravates* that cost fabulous sums!"

"They will spend all the more on the ladies." He looked round the room. "When Madame Gilbert opened her exhibition in Paris," he said, "she had the walls hung with crimson damask. Shall I order you crimson damask?"

But crimson damask did not satisfy Ella, neither did the more modern taste for lavenders and greys. There had only been one kind of lace in Madame Gilbert's Show; hers contained all kinds; and, to her eye, each variety asked for a special tint.

Influence had been brought to bear on the collection. Hoards had been ransacked and specimens lent which had never been shown in public before. From the first foreshadowings of the art in cutwork, drawnwork, and embroidery, in net and knotted fringe; from tombs of Egypt dug in the days when "Israel groaned in bondage"; from the Isles of Greece, where "burning Sappho loved and sang"; from Genoa the Superb and Venice of the Doges; from the Moors of Africa; from Spain and Portugal; from Northern Italy, France, Flanders, and Brabant; from the England of Queen Philippa to the England of Queen Victoria, the object-lesson ranged;—if not the actual treasured specimen which had survived the accidents of time, then in reproductions done from pictures, or from the marble on which the cunning hand of the patient sculptor had wrought in detail; or from drawings which witnessed in rude design to the first glimmerings of the art in many lands in bygone days, beginning with its earliest cradlings in the East.

Something of everything connected with her art Ella had secured, and marvellously well she had managed the display.

"This shall be my garden," she had said, "and these my flowers."

Flowers in a garden suggested colours of the rainbow melting into each other, perfectly pure, and these she had chosen; but she had not left them brightly shining as though the sun were

upon them. Her flowers looked more like flowers in the grey dawn upon which the spider had been busy over night. Each was veiled with a web of lace varying in texture, which the colour beneath was well adapted to enhance. Under the soft lustre of the wax lights nothing could have been more charming than the whole effect, and as Ella, seated on the daïs between the pillars that supported the musicians' gallery, contemplated her achievement, her heart swelled with delight.

"To-morrow! To-morrow!" she said to herself. "If only they will come!"

Her eye rested on the crowning glory of the collection, a fairy fabric of her own design and work, lent by the Duchess of Castlefield Saye, who was wrongly supposed to have paid a fabulous price for it.

Ella was reminded by it of the Duchess herself, in whom she had no faith. If her success to-morrow depended on any trouble the Duchess was likely to have taken on her behalf, then a very partial success it was bound to be.

With the thought Ella's spirits sank.

On one point Mr. Bosc had been inexorable. He would allow no public announcement of the exhibition. He had his orders, he said. There was to be no display in the windows. The door might stand open, but this concession apart, it might have been supposed that the object was not to advertise but to conceal the fact of there being any exhibition at all. Moreover, nobody was to be admitted except by ticket, to obtain which an introduction approved by Mr. Bosc was necessary.

These restrictions had filled Ella with consternation, and only partially could Mr. Bosc reassure her. He reminded her that she had powerful friends, begged her to have faith in them, and was calmly confident himself; but she continued to be troubled by the haunting dread that nobody would come, that the opening of her Exhibition would prove to be a solemn farce played to an empty house.

And now, suddenly, this dread became importunate. The fear of failure clutched her and chilled her to the bone. She left the daïs, drew the covers over her exhibits, put out the lights, and retired to her sitting-room, her buoyancy quenched, a prey to disheartenment.

A fire was laid in the grate. She put a match to it, drew up a chair, and sat watching the flame spread from the paper to the wood, and from the wood to the coal. How quickly the

desired result was obtained! And all from one tiny match—This glorious blaze! This reviving warmth! The comfort of it loosened the constriction of her heart. She began to think of her own career, her small beginning, her growing achievement. She seemed to herself like that fire that was ready laid, its potential activity only wanting the touch of a lighted match to release it. There had been potential activities enough, and no mistake, latent in herself from her birth, to be released—to be fired—and they had been fired, but how? She covered her face with her hands, and looked back at her own career. It presented itself to her in a series of scenes, of steps up, as it were.

Her earliest recollection was of a cottage, with hollyhocks in flower, as tall as itself. She was seated in the porch beside her grandmother, learning to make lace. They had pillows on their laps, and both were at work. It seemed to Ella that she had sat there all that part of her life, working and listening to her grandmother, who worked and talked. Upright, strong, dark, stern, and determined, Ella saw her, a handsome old woman, and awesome to most girls, but Ella had no fear of her.

"Sit up, my girl, and remember," she was saying. "You have a great inheritance. Beauty is your inheritance. Your great-grandmother was a beauty, I was a beauty, your poor mother was a beauty. I'm telling you, not to make you vain, but to make you wise in time. To make you aware of the worth of beauty. My mother was beautiful but she was not wise—not wise enough ever to realise the use and worth of beauty to a woman. She looked upon beauty as a snare. She was afraid that I should be vain if I knew that I was beautiful, and she concealed the knowledge from me, so I never knew my worth, and gave myself away for nothing. And it is only of late years that I have learnt that beauty is a great possession, not a thing to be vain of but to respect and cherish and invest at the highest rate of interest. Every girl is not fit to be trusted with the knowledge of this great possession, but I was clever enough to have done well with it, had I known; and you are clever enough. My mother did not see that I was clever enough to be trusted, and made the mistake of not telling me; and when my daughter grew up, I made a mistake too, a fatal mistake—a mother's mistake. I took it for granted that she would have the cleverness because she had the beauty, but she hadn't, and the knowledge that would have made me wise only made her foolish. She threw herself away."

Ella's retrospect was interrupted with a twinge here, by the thought of the poor old father at home—the poor old father with the figure of a turnip radish, but, oh, so kind and just! It was a twinge of shame that she should have it in her mind that her mother had thrown herself away on him.

But the stern old voice ran on: "You are more my child than your mother ever was. You have brains as well as beauty. I see the difference in you every day. You are steady to your task; she was not. You take your punishment when you deserve it, and you're ready to fight me when I'm unjust. You're strong and brave; your mother was weak and tearful. You argue, you reason; she tried to get over me with coaxing and cunning wiles. And she did get over me, more's the pity. I gave in against my better judgment because it made me wretched to see her look miserable; when I should have held out, whatever the pain to myself.

"But now I tell you. You can live decently on your inheritance, you can squander it, or you can make profit of it, great profit. I lived decently on mine; your mother—well, she is in her grave; it is for you to make the profit. You have the brains, I tell you, as well as the beauty. Set a price on yourself, and you will get it; you will be worth anything you ask. Every woman has her price, they say. It's a saying the men have, and it's true, though not in the dirty way they mean it. A woman here and there may take money in exchange for what no woman should give for money; she is the exception, a mere marketable commodity, not worth considering, except as an example to be avoided. You can be a good woman and a successful woman too. Nothing you can gain by losing your good name is worth having. All the world over the price a decent woman asks for herself is safety and respect, love and marriage. But look high for love, my girl, you can't look too high. It's in the highest you'll inspire it most. The higher born your gentleman the better he knows the worth of beauty; and beauty he will have, bought or stolen. He'll try to buy or steal it from the poor; that's his way with the poor. But make him pay your price. He will pay it when there's no other way. Stand firm—Marriage! Make marriage your price, and you'll get it. That's my advice to you. Never forget it."

"Marry a gentleman?" Ella asked.

"Ay, why not?"

"But if I don't find one to marry me?"

"Do as I tell you, and you'll find one right enough, if you stick to your price. And, until you get it, make lace."

"But can't I read books?"

"Oh, yes! Read, write, and cipher. Learn all you can. But always make lace. A gentleman loves a lily hand, and the lace-maker's hand is a lady's hand."

Ella mounted the next step. The scene shifted. The grandmother was gone, and she was the centre of a disturbance in the parlour of her father's little farmhouse. Ella in such surroundings was as one who had come from another sphere. Her stepmother was storming at her. Her father had just come in and was asking what the row was now.

"Mother says I must scrub the kitchen floor, and I won't! I won't!" Ella cried, tears of rage streaming down her cheeks. "I won't spoil my hands. I can't make lace if I spoil my hands."

"I'll 'ave no fine ladies 'ere," her stepmother screamed, "settin' in the parlour makin' lace, and not a dish washed yet."

"I'll not wash dishes," Ella sobbed. "Father, need I wash dishes? I'll soon be making grand lace, fit for a queen to wear. Look, father"—she showed him an old piece that she had borrowed to copy—"lace like this that Mrs. Pratt's lent me. There's nothing like it now. No one can make it. Even my grandmother couldn't. But *I* will. I have the brains. I'll get money for this"—she held up the diaphanous web—"hundreds and hundreds of pounds. Queen Victoria's wedding gown cost a thousand pounds. A whole gown of this would be priceless. Father, say I may sit here and make lace! Father, do let me!"

"The wench is mad with her Queen Victoria and her hundreds and hundreds of pounds," her stepmother stormed. "There's not a livin' wage to be made at the pillow. The pounds don't go into the workers' pockets. Her grandmother worked on the Queen's weddin' gown, and she died in a hovel. It's jest an excuse to set in the parlour, and act the fine lady, there in the winder, where the young men can see her—an' me slavin' in the kitchen. I'll not 'ave it. It's a stick you want across yer back, ye 'ussy——"

She flew at Ella, to hit her. Her father warded off the blow. Ella clung to his arm. He rounded on his wife. "None of that," he said. "She's no draft horse, this girl of mine; she's not for the plough. If you raise a 'and to 'er again, I'll clout you meself. Ay, and if you play the dummed stepmother again

wi' yer tongue, I'll clout yer, that niver raised a 'and to no woman yet i' me life. D'ye 'ear?—There, my girl, don't cry." He patted Ella's head. "I'll see you're not put upon. Set you down i' yer parlour, an' stick to yer trade. It's what you've been reared to."

Scene succeeded scene in quick succession, but mostly she was seated at the lattice window of the little parlour, hard at work, and a horseman rode by and looked up. Day after day, at the same hour, he rode by and looked up—Ninian, Marquis of Melton, eldest son of a Duke. She remembered her grandmother's words, "The higher born your gentleman, the better he knows the worth of beauty." But she made him no sign; she was not going to cheapen herself. Just three times had they spoken together, and those three times were not of her seeking. The first—oh, that morning! This was the first big step up, and Ella paused on it, hugging the recollection. It was when she had sold her lace to the Duchess, that marvellous piece which it had taken her two years, working from daylight till dark, to make, with infinite pains—not counting all the time and toil she had had to devote to the discovery of how to make it, when she was unravelling the secret from the ancient morsel which Ursula Pratt had lent her for the purpose. There was not such another piece of lace in the world as hers, and the Duchess was offering her fifteen pounds for it, when Lord Melton, fresh from a ride, came into the room. Ella's eyes dilated. She saw again the effect of her beauty on him at close quarters, saw the glow and the gladness, smiled at the innocent ruse which had enabled him to speak with her alone for a moment, admired the tact with which he had managed to induce his mother to pay Ella's price for the lace, or rather, to borrow the money from him to pay for it—Ella shrewdly suspected that three hundred pounds were never offered him back, nor asked for.

The next step brought her to the ecstatic moment in the kitchen at Red Rose Farm, when she handed her father the money she had made and cleared him of debt; when her stepmother wept and begged her pardon; when her half-brother Robert examined the cheque, looked at her significantly, and said, "It was not the Duchess who drew this cheque." That was easily explained. But Lord Melton's cheque had set Robert thinking. He saw Melton follow her from church—that day when they met for the second time, and stood long together, talking, on

the bridge over the brook. It was springtime then, and the young green leaves of the beeches looked like lace against the sky.

Afterwards Robert had spoken to her—very gently, very kindly, with all respect, warning her; and she had answered, "You are right, Bob. You are always right. He shall not walk with me again."

But they met once more, for the third time, by accident. It was one afternoon. She was sitting on the hillside below the Castle. Opposite was the giant crag of the Coastguard's Death, and away to the left the leaden sea, with heavy clouds impending above it. Her heart was heavy, too, when he came in sight, on horseback.

Her mind skimmed that scene—how he flung himself from his horse, his impetuous embrace, his complaint of her long avoidance of him, and what she had said, that she would see him no more, because no good could come of it.

Yes, she had sent Melton away. He had gone abroad——

Hastily, Ella mounted the next step. She had held herself high, but she was glad to escape from the recollection.

The next step was a visit from the Duke himself. He had surprised her one morning at work, the reason he gave for his coming being a piece of lace which he wished to order as a present for his daughter on her birthday. Ella had no lace ready of the kind he wanted, but offered to make him a piece if there were time. It then appeared that he had forgotten when his daughter's birthday was, so he decided to have the lace for a Christmas present, and insisted on giving Ella a hundred pounds in advance, which he called a retaining fee. And they had talked! That was the wonderful part of the visit. Ella, habitually so reserved, had expanded and unburdened her mind to this elderly gentleman, as never before to any one. She had told the Duke of her efforts to revive the lacemaking industry in the county and place it on an equitable commercial basis, of the extent to which the workgirls were exploited by unscrupulous middlemen, and of her desire to have a place of her own in London to save them from the sharks who paid them such shamefully inadequate prices for their work. And the Duke had been sympathetic.

From that time she had frequently met him when she was going to and fro between the farm and Pratt's Place, to study French and German with Mrs. Pratt; and he had discussed her

project, and many other subjects with her again and again; and always she could talk to him as to no one else.

Then one day there had come a letter from the Duke's family lawyer, Mr. Bosc, written on behalf of the Duchess. The Duchess offered Ella Banks a house in London and the means to carry out her project. And here she was, all the preliminaries settled, ready to begin, with her dower of beauty, added to her stock-in-trade—not capricious beauty, wayward and feckless, but purposeful beauty, animated by fine intelligence, directed by an indomitable will. She had her grandmother, who was the master light of all her seeing, to thank for that. It had been her grandmother's constant aim to strengthen her will. "To break a will is to make a fool" was one of her sayings which Ella remembered now.

The retrospect had answered its purpose. It had restored her confidence. The steps she had already mounted vouched for her ability, and gave her courage for the next attempt. Standing where she was, Ella looked out upon the prospect, and found it very fair indeed.

CHAPTER VI

THE SOCIETY PITCH. ELLA'S FIRST INNINGS

1

THE day and the hour at last, the door flung wide, and Beveridge on duty in the hall. Elderly, soldierlike in his dark uniform, with several medals on his breast, he stood at ease, awaiting the event. A pathway of moss-green carpet, spread from the showroom right out under the awning to the edge of the pavement for the carriage folk to step upon, had completed the preparations; and now Ella herself, a lovely finishing touch, came floating down the broad stairs towards him, smiling in acknowledgment of his morning salute.

"Our opening day, Beveridge," she said.

"The suspicious moment has arrived, my lady," he rejoined, going beyond his means in the matter of expression in his anxiety to do honour to the occasion.

"Auspicious, let us hope," she answered gaily. "All is ready, I suppose?" She glanced round. "Will all go well, I wonder?"

"My lady, the sun is shining!"

"Oh, the good omen!" she exclaimed, and passed on into the showroom.

At a high desk close to the door, a short, stout, shrewd-looking, middle-aged woman, cashier and bookkeeper, was already seated. It was a commanding position, from which the whole room, and any one who entered or left it, could be seen; and she looked like a woman whose observation nothing would escape. Ella called her the Argus-Eyed.

They greeted each other informally.

"All ready at the receipt of custom?" Ella asked.

"All ready, Miss Banks," was the firm reply, accompanied by a sweeping glance.

"Am I all right, too, eh?" Ella inquired laughingly.

"You are a picture, Miss Banks," the Argus-Eyed protested.

Ella's forewoman, Miss Hildenborough, a slight, elegant, dark-haired girl, with big brown steady eyes, and quiet capable demeanour, joined them in time to hear both question and answer.

"A lovely picture!" she amended.

Ella had won the hearts of her assistants.

There was an irregular projection at the corner of the house, which formed a deep bay, lighted by three large windows. This recess was a part of the ballroom, and Ella had had it curtained off for her own use. Here she established herself now, and sat toying nervously with an order book. Would there be any orders, she wondered? The doubt obtruded in spite of good omens. Why wouldn't they let her advertise?—Ella surveyed the room, her garden. The rainbow tints glowed, softly exquisite, beneath their veils of cobweb lace. It was beautiful, yes, but suppose no one came to see it? Carriages were rolling by, but they all seemed to be passing on and away. From the three wide windows she could see up and down the two angles of the street and over the way. The sun was shining, as Beveridge had said, but not on the house: didn't that alter the omen?

The morning mist hung about, burnished with brightness. All that was ordinary in the handsome houses, all that was familiar in the people passing to and fro in jogging cab and swift bowling carriage, was transformed by its golden haze. The irregular houses were merged into one great dream palace, and the moving figures were like figures in a dream, indistinct and unreal. There was faerie in the London street, poesy made vis-

ible, and Ella, enchanted, lost all sense of herself for awhile, of the day, of the coming event.

She was recalled from her abstraction by the sound of voices —the voices of people loitering in her garden, among her flowers. The Argus-Eyed was on the alert, Miss Hildenborough looked primed, as though to "step forward."

Ella's heart bounded. Sheltered from observation herself by the curtains which draped the deep embrasure in which she sat, she could see most of the room, and out across it through the folding doors into the hall. Her orders were to receive the Duchess, who would come first so as to be on the spot when the Princess arrived,—the popular Princess Anna, who was to open the Show.

Ella, waiting on the watch, had to brace herself now that the moment was at hand. These last laggard minutes tried her nerve, as nothing had ever tried it before.

The question, which had been "Would they come?" was soon "Will they never stop coming?" Carriage after carriage set down its occupants at the door. Down one side of the street there was soon a long line of them, standing empty, while up the other an interminable queue advanced in slow procession, taking their turn to set down. Ladies dressed in the height of the fashion, and ladies dowdy but distinguished-looking in spite of their dowdiness, with a fair sprinkling of well-dressed men, entered in quick succession. Some lingered in the hall, but more came into the showroom, and looked about them with perfunctory glances. Some few couples, drifting apart, hung over specimens of lace, on which, however, they scarcely bestowed a cursory glance. Their eyes were for each other.

Attention generally centred on Miss Hildenborough. People made for her straight as they entered, and stood at gaze, trying to persuade themselves that she answered to the description of Ella which had chiefly attracted them to the Show. Rumour had it that Ella was a wonder-woman, that nothing like her had been seen for centuries.

There are fashions in beauty which Society follows because not to admire is to be "all out of it." Suggestion influences the opinion of many, others pretend to admire so as to be in the fashion, numbers remain neutral, but an occasional one here and there is independent of the crowd. This is the one who dictates. In the absence of such an one on the present occasion

the crowd at first did not know what to think, but it was anxious to believe what it had been told to expect, therefore, for quite half an hour, the stream circled around Miss Hildenborough, and she narrowly escaped being entered as a wonder-woman in the register of the collective taste of the leisured class. It was the one risk of the kind she ever ran, and she was never made aware of it.

Opinion in the leisured class is dependent upon phrases. The heirloom of a too ample leisure is laziness. When there is no call upon mind or muscles to exert themselves, both suffer from the atrophy which attends inaction. The mind of the idle of society is a stagnant pool, seldom freshened by a steady current of thought, but often stirred up by sticks and stones. The chartered thrower of these sticks and stones is the phrasemaker. The splashes he makes are a pleasurable break in the monotony of the polished surface.

The Honourable Colin Drindon, a poetaster who wrote under the pseudonym of Joyday Flowers, was a pet phrasemaker of the moment. His poetry was in vogue among his social contemporaries, principally because he was one of themselves. The fact that he could write at all was enough in itself to give prominence to a man in a set whose chief claim to intellectual superiority is based on an assumption not often supported by proof; but Col Drindon's poetry alone would not have won him distinction had he not been an adept in the use of the best advertising medium of the day—an eccentric pose. In those days if a man could concentrate attention on himself by an impudent pose, and rivet it by giving peculiar expression to common thoughts, he became a celebrity. Col Drindon had attained to this sort of celebrity, but rather through force of circumstances than by design.

He sauntered in now, twirling a flower in his hand; a well-dressed, well-fed-looking, personable young man, with a mass of fair hair in admirable order. It was his pleasure to cultivate the unexpected, and in all things a carefully dressed poet is the most unexpected.

Society, still gaping at Miss Hildenborough, with its mind unmade up with regard to her beauty, hailed his approach. What would he think of her?—Apparently his mind was made up with one slow glance. Sad of mien he turned away from her. There could be no doubt about it, Col Drindon was disappointed.

Mr. Julius Harkles, coming in, encountered him as he returned to the hall.

"What is she like?" Mr. Harkles asked eagerly.

"What will be the next article, if you please, muddem?" Col answered despondently. He was next seen standing apart in the hall contemplating his flower.

Meantime Mr. Harkles passed from one to another imparting the fiat which swept Miss Hildenborough into the category in which those abide to whom is attached the usually derogatory "good thing" that somebody said about them.

The babble of voices swelled. Fresh arrivals went round shaking hands. Everybody seemed to know everybody, and it looked as if they had come merely to see each other, so little attention did they pay to anything else. Ella's heart sank. Were they not going to appreciate her lace, after all? But in the way they hung about, there was something that reminded her of the sheep on her father's farm, when the dogs had rounded them up and were keeping them together until the shepherd should order their direction, and she felt reassured. Of course, they were waiting for the Show to be formally opened; for the Princess to come and give them a lead.

2

But supposing that the Princess did not come, after all? She was to be depended upon, it was said—barring accident, of course; and she was always punctual. "Punctuality is the politeness of princes," and surely it was past the time! Ella clasped her hands and wrung them, alternately, in a fever of anxiety.

Presently Mr. Bosc came into the hall, and was greeted by many acquaintances. He stood, his tall hat and neat inevitable umbrella in one hand, a rock round which a stream of people swirled, washing up against him, as it were, in relays, plying him with questions. Among them all his was the only face that Ella knew, but it was the face of a friend, and one friend at hand is enough to make a whole crowd of strangers of no importance. Ella's heart was lightened by his coming, her mind diverted; she forgot herself, and began to think about him.

Hitherto she had not thought about him except as the Duchess's agent, deputed to attend to her business. Now, in her

need of human sympathy, she was quick to realise that he was also a human being, and one moreover who had shown her much gratuitous kindness over and above his attention to her business, kindness which she had taken for granted at the time, but remembered now with proper appreciation. They had had differences of opinion, he and she, even a tiff now and then, when his discretion had clashed with her will—she remembered that now also, and she acknowledged to herself, with regret, that she had often been irritable and exacting, while he had always been forbearing and considerate—and how right! Why had she doubted his wisdom? Of course he knew best, look at all these people!—By what means, though, had he collected them? Mrs. Bosc had said, to reassure her: "The occasion will not be advertised, my dear, it will be made known." Assuredly it had been made known, but how?

It was no easy task that had been confided to Affable Bosc, the task of helping Ella to the attainment of her object under such restrictions as had been imposed upon him. His instructions were to protect her; to see to it that such publicity as was inevitable should be of the most carefully guarded kind; that the British Public was to have no indiscriminate right of admission to the Corner House, as to an ordinary shop, but that nevertheless a public must be found for her.

Such a public could only be of the most exclusive kind, the Inner Set itself, in fact; which is hard to get at, and not to be attracted by means that appeal to the commonalty. "We never touch anything that shrieks at us from those horrid hoardings," —therefore printed announcements, such as are usual when the Outer Set is to be attracted for its money's-worth, were of no use. The thing to do was to make this first occasion one of those which the Inner Set reserves for itself primarily, that it may have first lap of the cream off whatever is toward, in an undefiled atmosphere emanating from its own exclusive body. The difficulty was, how to convey to the Inner Set, convincingly, that there was cream to be lapped. Mr. Bosc resorted to the automatic force of Rumour, the *Phêmê* of Ancient Greece and Modern Hindustan. Rife everywhere, a word suffices to set it in motion; but the word must be the right word, rightly spoken, by the right person. Mr. Bosc's professional standing brought him into touch with the right people for many purposes, and experience had taught him how to manage them for his own. Accordingly the forthcoming Exhibition was heard of in the

highest places. Great ladies had let fall a hope, Royalty had expressed a wish, which hope and wish Rumour had caught up and distributed in the Inner Set, with such details added as were necessary to show what profit there was in the concern; for the Inner Set people are keen on any chance that promises to pay in kind, or in repute. But especially are they keen on anything exceptional, exceptional beauty and talent, and things exceptionally novel or rare. Mr. Bosc knew them inside out, and just what rumours would excite them, and so it came about that this morning in the height of the season saw them flocking to the Corner House, filling the wide entrance hall with their babble, and overflowing into the showroom,—for the ostensible purpose of encouraging industry and art, but more particularly with a view to their own amusement.

Mr. Bosc looked in for a moment upon Ella, smiled and blinked.

"All right?" he asked, with evidently no doubt but that all was right.

"All right," she answered, smiling. "Mr. Bosc." She stopped him as he was turning to go. "What time is it?"

He looked at his watch. "There should be a clock here," he remarked. "I'll make a note of it. It is just a quarter to twelve, fifteen minutes yet till the Duchess arrives. Sure I can do nothing for you?"

"You have done everything for me," she answered.

Oh, elastic time! so short when all is well, so long drawn out to one in pain or suspense. The Duchess was not overdue. Ella had had no need to worry; but the minutes that she had been sitting there had each been an hour to her.

3

As it happened, the Duchess was just setting out, with Lady Ann, to go to the Corner House. The Duke encountered them in the hall.

"Going for an early drive?" he asked pleasantly.

"I am going to that girl's Exhibition," the little Duchess answered, and compressed her lips.

"That girl's Exhibition?" he echoed vaguely.

"Yes. You know. Ella Banks."

"Oh! Ah! Yes! Of course! Ella Banks," he rejoined, as

if with an effort to remember. "How good of you! Really most kind, you know. But then you always are good and kind," he added confidentially.

"Why don't you come, papa?" Ann asked.

"My dear child!" he exclaimed. "Bull in a china shop sort of thing. Besides, I am busy."

This answer perplexed Lady Ann. She knew her father for a connoisseur, expert in lace, and given to poking about in all kinds of queer corners after rare specimens. Why should he be out of place in an Exhibition? But, perhaps, being busy——

The subject sank from her mind as water sinks into sand, and as all other subjects sank when she tried to pursue them.

The little Duchess was not in a good mood when they drove off. Everything was tiresome.

"Men are all alike!" she exclaimed.

"Are they?" said Ann, wondering. They all seemed so different to her.

Her mother was in difficulties with her parasol. It would not open. Ann put it right for her. The Duchess warded off the sun's glance with a jerk of her parasol, irritably, as though it had been an impertinent intrusion, and returned to her grievance. But to the innocent Ann it seemed that she had changed the subject.

"I thought your dear father particularly wished me to launch Ella Banks," she complained.

"But doesn't he?" Ann asked.

"Well, you saw!" her mother rejoined. "He made quite a point of it the other day, but this morning he has forgotten all about it. So like a man!" she sighed.

The carriage was caught in a block. "*Oh!* how tiresome!" the Duchess exclaimed, all aflutter with impatience. "Now we shall be late, and I shall never be forgiven."

"The Princess may be late," Ann ventured gently, to console her.

"Nonsense!" said the Duchess. "She's never late. How can she be late?"

Ann ventured no more. Her diffidence made her feel that it was she who was silly.

They turned into the side street, and, as by right of precedence, were carried past the long queue of carriages awaiting their turn to set down; the Duchess gave vent to her feelings in

sundry exclamations. "Oh, it is here, is it! Why here when half the neighbourhood belongs to us? And the Corner House, too! The Dower House!! Poor dear Alicia's home!!! What *could* your dear father be thinking of! How can the house be used again as a Dower House? No one could live in a house that had once been a shop."

"Papa said the other day he intended you to have a better Dower House."

"Does he mean me to be a widow!" cried the Duchess.

The distress caused by this cruel anticipation put the other grievance to flight, and was in turn forgotten in the commotion caused by her arrival.

The Duchess stepped from her carriage into the thick of Society, troubled water on which the spirit rarely moves; where, every day, so many people, in their incessant pursuit of amusement, let go their chances of happiness. But it was the Duchess's natural element, and this plunge into it with a splash altered her outlook. Her countenance lighted up. She shed smiles and gracious words in profusion on the acquaintances who thronged about her, impeding her progress, so that on her way from the carriage to the hall, she had time to look round, and to find in everything she saw cause for disapproval. It was not that there was any fault in the arrangements; she would have been rather pleased than otherwise, had they been faulty. It was the amount of care evident and of taste displayed that annoyed her. "All this for that girl! And poor dear Alicia's own pretty things in use—what extravagance! I know what it is; your dear father has never looked into the matter at all." This to Lady Ann on the way home.

But the crowning offence was not in the order maintained but in the changes made, particularly in the pathway of soft, rich, moss-green carpet. Crimson is generally used. And the Duchess detected, though she could not have expressed it, a courageously independent spirit in the innovation. In the hope of pleasing her, people rubbed in her dissatisfaction by praising her *protégée's* taste. She heard it remarked on all sides how wonderfully well the colour contrasted with the black and white of the marble pavement, the beautifully carved ebony furniture, the whole character of the dark panelled hall. "So much more natural, too," gushed Lady Ballard and Sarb—commonly called Lady Brandy and Soda, because of the B. and S. "Green is the tint to walk upon, the colour of the grass, not crimson. Your

Ella Banks can think, I should say! How clever of you to have discovered her!"

The Duchess was not magnetic, but the prestige of her position acted like a magnet on the various persons in the crowd who were subject to that kind of attraction, and drew them about her. She halted on the threshold of the showroom.

But where was the workgirl? Surely she should have come forward to receive her patroness! People glared at Miss Hildenborough, who stood like an overdriven heifer, in mild-eyed bewilderment. She looked timidly at the Duchess, she looked helplessly at the curtained recess, and back again, uncertain what to do.

The moment had come for Ella to show herself. It was a tense moment for Mr. Bosc in the background, a decisive moment for her—first impressions are so all-important. His hope was in the way she went at a thing, wholly concentrated, without a trace of self-consciousness, once she put hand to plough.

With a penetrating clatter of metal rings upon metal, which drew all eyes to the recess, a beautiful slim white hand cast the curtains aside, and she appeared, a vision satisfying enough to reward even that assembly for the trouble of coming to see her.

Mr. Bosc could have clapped his hands and cheered.

As she came forward, the throng parted involuntarily to make way for her.

Gravely intent, her eyes on the group at the door, yet unhasting, she floated across the wide space, scarcely seeming to touch the ground.

"Talk about the poetry of motion, eh, what, Duchess!" Lord Ballard and Sarb whispered, with an appreciative smack of his lips.

"More on wings than on feet!" sighed The O'Haleron, young, Irish, and emotional, strung to poetry by the general tension.

Col Drindon looked up from his flower, and was reminded of the one figure in the world poised to step as Ella stepped, poised for a thousand years, holding the eye in tantalised expectation.

"The Winged Victory!" he exclaimed.

"By Jove, yes!" Lord Ballard and Sarb caught on. "Ticked her off to a T. Trust you poet chaps to hit it off! The Winged Victory, on the wing. The Winged Victory!"

He gave the words like a toast, and voices on all sides, murmuring discreetly, echoed them like a toast, "The Winged Victory!"

But Mr. Julius Harkles, not to be out of it, and, in his haste, catching at the first thing that occurred to him, regardless of appositeness, lightly lowered the strain to bathos. "'O death where is thy sting! O grave where is thy victory!'" he said, mincingly.

The Duchess turned on him. "Oh, don't! Don't!" she cried. "The horrid omen!"

An old impression, revived by the irrelevant quotation, made it painfully meaningful, and it was in a shrinking flutter that she received Ella. If Ella's curtsey had been a blow, the look that the Duchess gave her would have been appropriate.

Ella recoiled a step, and stood, proudly resentful. The duel had recommenced.[1]

Mr. Harkles made a mental note for future reference: "The Duchess does not like that girl, and that girl does not like the Duchess—*Why?*" He prided himself on the power to put two and two together, and certainly, by dint of constant practice, had mastered the knack of it better than he had mastered the art of apt quotation; which is not to say that his addition was always correct.

Only a momentary hush marked the encounter between Ella and the Duchess, but during that moment the Duchess became aware of curious eyes probing for an explanation. With a valiant effort she recovered herself. One sweeping glance sufficed to take in the details of Ella's dress. It was an apparently simple white dress, with open sleeves, which left the beautiful forearms bare; but to the Duchess's practised eye the simplicity was eloquent of perfect cut and costly material. She knew the value of the soft clinging drapery, and of the age-tinted lace, of which there was just enough to decorate without loading it; a *paire d'engageantes à demi rang de point à l'aiguille* on the sleeves, with front and *jabot* of the same; but they might have been an inheritance direct from some great lady of the seventeenth century, such perfect examples were they of the Mechlin of the period. Just such another arrangement and set *d'engageantes* appears in the portrait by Rigaud of Elizabeth Charlotte de Bavière, Duchesse d'Orleans, Madame Palatine, at Versailles. The Duchess knew the picture well, and would have accused the girl of having had the insolence to copy the sleeves had it been the right time to administer a reprimand; but remembering the open eyes and ears of the crowd which had closed in behind

[1] See *Adnam's Orchard.*

her, she refrained—not because it was not the moment to prejudice the cause she had come to profit, but because of the position she might be placed in if she were worsted in public by Ella, whose power to hold her own she had reason to fear.

"Ah, this is where you are, is it?" she said, putting up her lorgnon, and glancing round superciliously.

"By your Grace's goodness," Ella answered.

This public advertisement of her Grace's goodness was mollifying. She made a little deprecating gesture with her hands, as though modestly setting aside the credit, and everybody smiled admiringly. It was a pleasant moment for the Duchess.

But the next she was nowhere in any one's estimation, for her Royal Highness had taken the floor. The crowd, as by magic, split in two to make way for her; men bent low and ladies sank to the ground in an ecstasy of loyal devotion, which display, however, was somewhat discounted by sundry grimaces which certain of the gathering exchanged with each other behind the royal back.

The Princess waddled in, tramp, tramp, an imposing figure, her small feet, flattened by the weight they had to support, looking, as they were, entirely inadequate.

Her costume was insistent to the eye, both in colour and texture, the colour being of that hot shade of heliotrope which triumphs in any light, and the texture of the hard shiny kind which proclaims itself satin of the stiffest from every point of view. The lace upon it seemed to have been thrown over it to be shown, it bore so little relation to the design as a whole; her trinkets were apparently worn for the same purpose; her hat, which was of a size to attract attention, was also an isolated detail, calculated to increase the trade in millinery materials; and altogether she produced the effect of having donned as much as she could at one time for the encouragement of a variety of insular industries. The effect suggested good nature, and good-natured was the adjective popularly applied to her. When the essence of a character is goodness, only bad hearts make a mock of minor details such as the Princess Anna's taste in dress; and those who smiled and grimaced at her appearance behind her back betrayed in themselves the lamentable trait.

Attended by several ladies and gentlemen, she met the Duchess smiling, and greeted her cordially. Then with prominent grey eyes gradually opening to their widest extent in an effort to

make sure that she saw aright, she turned her attention to Ella, who, facing her in the doorway, was made conspicuous by her indoor dress and hatless head.

The Duchess named her, "Ella Banks, ma'am, the lacemaker."

Ella dropped a curtsey which would have done her credit at Court.

"My God, what a beauty!" the Princess exclaimed in German, with hearty appreciation. Her voice was thick and deep, her intonation guttural, her accent Hanoverian.

Ella's head jerked, and she with difficulty controlled an impulse to draw herself up in protest, her delicacy shocked.

The Duchess remarked that upward jerk of the head, and was reminded.

"She probably understands German," she whispered warningly.

"Alors, parlons Français," the Princess answered aloud, the Hanoverian accent in evidence.

"She understands French too, I'm afraid," the Duchess again whispered, deprecatingly, as though apologising for a solecism.

"She is a wonder, your lacemaker," the Princess exclaimed, in English this time, and at a pitch which could be heard by everybody.

"She is a wonder!" The word went round. Gentlemen repeated the observation in undertones, ladies stared with varying expressions of face, for the most part interrogative. A faint tinge of pink showed on the transparent pallor of Ella's cheeks, but otherwise she remained impassive.

Her Royal Highness, looking at the girl as she might have looked at a picture or statue, noted the wild-rose tint with a nod, and burst out again with *"Wunderschön, mein Gott!* Where did you get her, Duchess? And she speaks German and French and makes lace! Show me your lace, my child, and speak German and French."

She was for passing into the showroom at once, but a gentleman in attendance detained her with a whisper.

"Ach!" she exclaimed. "I had forgot."

Then looking round, and as if she were repeating by heart words to which she attached no meaning, she performed the appointed ceremony.

"It gieves me much pleasure," she began, "to haff come here to-day for the purpose to encourage Art and Industry by opening this most interesting, most useful Exhibition. The beauti-

ful collection of—what is it?"—some one prompted "Lace"—"the beautiful collection of lace which we haff come to admire vill be admired by us all, I am sure. I myself am a great admirer. My friend, the Duchess of Castlefield Saye—— It is to the generosity and taste of my friend the Duchess of Castlefield Saye that we owe this opportunity of seeing this"—her rolling eye rested upon Ella—"exquisite creature!" she broke off.

"Creation—lace," a flurried voice put in, in an undertone.

"Eh? What's that?" the Princess asked, turning in the direction of the speaker. "Lace? Oh, yes! I adore beauty!" she added informally.

Applause followed, during which her gentleman in attendance again whispered to her. She nodded comprehension, drew herself up for the final effort, and gabbled: "Ladies and gentlemen, it is with much pleasure that I now declare this Exhibition over." "Open," was despairingly prompted. "Eh? What? I said open," she loudly protested. "Now, my child——"

Amidst a clapping of hands, mingled with restrained mirth, to neither of which did her Royal Highness pay the slightest attention—she crossed the threshold of the showroom. The ladies and gentlemen in attendance immediately followed, headed by the Duchess, while the rest of the company, jostling each other to secure a good place, pressed round as close as etiquette permitted, eyes and ears open, and as curious—those Court satellites—as if Royalty were a phenomenon which they had never before caught sight of, even in the distance. But the Princess, having seized upon Ella, went her way, talking loudly in polyglot jargon, and as disregardful of the surrounding company as if they were lay figures—which, by the way, not inaptly describes their potentialities so far as their fitness went to play any part on their own initiative. They were puppets of the day, most of them, whose actions were determined by the spirit of the day paramount in their own set, a spirit which seldom moved them to good purpose.

"Ach! It is a dream, your Exhibition!" the Princess exclaimed, after a comprehensive glance round. "And you can do all this yourself?"

"Not all, your Royal Highness," Ella answered modestly.

"You have still new worlds to conquer? And they tell me you have invented a lace, yes?"

"Not invented, your Royal Highness—recovered," Ella ex-

plained. "A morsel had survived of a very rare kind. No one knew how it was done——"

"Show me the lost kind which you recovered," her Royal Highness commanded comfortably.

Ella piloted her to the fairy web which stood in the place of honour.

The Princess made a minute inspection of the lace, punctuated with observations. "Exquisite fillings and delicate reliefs," she remarked. "It makes one think of Boucher, but it is not the *point d'Argenton* which he loved to paint. Hum—*barettes picotées*—how do you call them?"

"Looped bars or tyes," Ella translated.

"Somewhat the character of *guipure de Flandres,*" the Princess pursued, peering closer through a pair of pince-nez, while the company pressed round, hanging on her words, and craning their necks to catch a glimpse of the details as she enumerated them; "but finer than any *Flandres* I know. More like the Belgian *Duchesse* for lightness. And *réseau* as well as *bride,* like *point d'Alençon.* Pillow, of course—yet I don't know. These devices, they might be *à l'aiguille—punti in aria—?*"

She looked at Ella.

"They are not needle point, your Royal Highness."

"Then they must be *punti a piombini*—bone, bobbin—Hein?"

"That was the difficulty, your Royal Highness," Ella explained. "How to produce the effect was part of the secret lost."

"À la bonne heure!" the Princess exclaimed. She was getting excited. "But the other part?" She peered again at the lace, frowning intently in her eagerness. "Don't tell me! If I can't find out for myself, I know nothing of lace. One, two, three, four, five, six—they *are!* Six-sided! The lost *bride* recovered—the *bride picotée* itself at last! I felicitate you, mademoiselle," she said solemnly, "with all my heart." The company applauded rapturously.

Ella bowed and tried to speak, but could not at first command her voice. She tried to express her thanks to the Princess for her gracious words, but the Princess was standing off from the lace, gazing again at it, and would not listen.

"And you made that!" she exclaimed at last. "I veel haff it!"

"It is the property, your Royal Highness, of her Grace the Duchess," Ella informed her.

The Princess turned to the Duchess. "Dear Duchess," she pleaded earnestly, "you veel let me haff it, yes?"

The Duchess fluttered her plumes in great perturbation, but she was monkey-quick to see her way out of a difficulty. "Ah!" she sighed, "if only it rested with me! But there is the entail."

"It is *already* in the entail?" the Princess asked, raising her eyebrows sceptically.

The Duchess threw up her little hands. "Alas!" she sighed, inwardly salving her conscience by determining that the lace should be put into the entail forthwith.

The Princess shrugged her huge shoulders, and turned to Ella: "Then you will make me a replica, yes?" she decided.

The Duchess gave the workgirl an appealing glance. She did not want this unique treasure copied for Royalty or anybody else. And Ella understood. It was a difficult moment, but she remembered all she owed to her patroness, and determined to be loyal.

"You veel make me my piece as fast as you can," the Princess added.

"Your Royal Highness—I regret infinitely—the pattern has been destroyed."

"You must repeat it."

"Impossible. Your Royal Highness will excuse me. I cannot repeat that design."

"Why?"

"Because of the cost."

"The cost! What has the cost to do with it?" the Princess asked sharply. "Do you think you will not be paid?"

The Duchess quivered with excitement. She supposed that the tiresome, mercenary girl was hesitating, and after all she had done for her, too! These people don't know what gratitude means!

But Ella was only taking time to find an unanswerable excuse.

"I am thinking of what *I* should have to pay, your Royal Highness," she said at last, firmly. "If I reproduced that design, it would cost me my eyesight. No two eyes could stand the strain a second time."

The Princess was human as well as Royal. The lovely eyes appealed to her. "So! An impossible price indeed!" She sighed and peered into the fairy fabric again regretfully. Then she turned to the Duchess.

"I covet your lace," she said; "is there no way, no?"

The Duchess made a despairing gesture.

"You are helpless in the matter?"

The Duchess repeated the expressive gesture.

"Ach, neffer mind," Royalty chuckled comfortably. "There iss always the Duke."

The Duchess only blinked. Her good man was too keen a connoisseur himself to let such a treasure go out of the family, and he was famous for his tact. Not even a Royal marauder would have a chance of wresting the lace from him.

In her relief the Duchess actually smiled upon Ella, a transient gleam of favour, soon overcast, and succeeded by a strong desire to get away at once from the horrid girl and her horrid show.

"You must not tire yourself, ma'am," she whispered to the Princess. "Your goodness has done all that was necessary."

But Royalty was endowed with German thoroughness, patient of detail, when the pursuit was congenial.

"My goodness must have its reward, then," she proclaimed in her loud, thick voice, cheerily. "Now, ve veel begin at the very beginning. Neffer have I had the chance so to enjoy myself. Oh, *la gloria di Punti!* I do loff lace!"

Mr. Julius Harkles, who had gradually worked his way to the front in order to be "in it"—the height of his ambition—now saw his chance. He had come loaded with learning, hastily acquired and undigested, on the subject of lace. For the benefit of those near by he translated the Princess's exclamation with a comment of his own. "The Glory of stitches!" he said. "What do we not owe to stitches!"

Lord Ballard and Sarb, in the background, told Col Drindon in confidence, that a stitch in time saves nine, and Col rejoined that a stitch in his side he couldn't abide.

In the rear of the Princess, comments of this kind were being flung about cautiously the whole time. Her entourage behaved like naughty children in church. When she looked at them they were all gravely intent on the business of the day; when she looked away they got to their games again. Some of the younger ladies would gladly have painted her nose, had opportunity offered, as their ancestresses had painted the nose of the aged Elizabeth, and the gentlemen would have thought the joke a good one. There had been changes of manners and dress in the interval, but family traits persisted.

Mr. Harkles caught the Princess's eye and saw his chance. "What was the origin of lace?" he began, then stopped short for effect; but his eloquent aposiopesis was spoilt by Ella and the Princess, both having mistaken for a question what was to have been the preamble to a disquisition.

"Accident," Ella answered.

"Loff and longing, I should say," the Princess corrected her.

Ella bent to the correction.

On looking up Mr. Harkles faced her, and, recognising him, she lost countenance. She had only seen him once before, in Piccadilly, but that one glimpse had burnt him into her recollection for a man to be laughed at. Suddenly, alongside of her, a street arab had yelled in derision, turned a Catherine wheel in an ecstasy of mirth, and then, coming right side up again, and as though he could not contain himself for very joy of the discovery, had pulled at her dress, and pointed.

At first all that she saw was a tall gentleman, built up to a fine figure by his tailor, who had obviously done for him all that a tailor can do for a man in modern dress; but the dirty little finger, insisting on a closer inspection, guided her eyes down below the faultlessly-fitting frockcoat to where, at every step, the tagged ends of a long white silk staylace gyrated deliriously.

Ella gave the urchin a shilling for his flattering confidence in her sense of humour. But her sense of humour was not strong and she had been little amused at the time, and only thought of the staylace afterwards as an indication of character. Now, however, her nerves being in that strained condition when a little thing upsets one's gravity, the gyrating staylace recurred to her mind as something exquisitely ludicrous, and she beamed on Mr. Harkles, who mistook her smile for a compliment, and responded, much gratified.

The Princess continued: "You know the loffly story," she said, her German accent, which she could control pretty well when she was on her guard, becoming more pronounced as she relaxed.

"Oh, ma'am, do tell us the story!" a fulsome voice implored; and, seeing her smile, her attendant satellites joined their entreaties.

"Vell," she said, "there was vonce a young girl, a beautiful girl. If I believed in reincarnation I should think——" she looked at Ella. "It was in the Adriatic, on one of the isles in the lagoon. She was betrothed to a young fisherman, and she

made him a new net to catch fish. And the first time he used it, he brought up in it an exquisite thing of petrified wrack-grass, knitted together by the lightest of fibres like lace. This exquisite thing he gave to his *fiancée*. They were to be married, but war broke out, and he was pressed into the Venetian navy, and sent to the East. His poor young betrothed was inconsolable, and spent long hours gazing at his gift to her, mourning for him, and longing for his return. And as she gazed, without thinking, her eye dwelt on the details of the wonderful petrified thing, the loffly ribs, the light connecting fibres; and she began to twist and plait the strings weighted with leetle leads which hung round the net she had made him and was taking care of for him. And she wrought and wrought until little by little there grew under her hand in thread an imitation of the beloved gift, the beautiful lacelike wrack-grass. Now," she turned to Ella. "Did I not say well? Loff and longing were the origin of lace. Did you know the story?"

"I was thinking of it, your Royal Highness, when I spoke," Ella answered.

"And you still say 'accident,' yes?"

"And evolution, your Royal Highness." Ella glanced, as she spoke, towards the earliest tentative examples in her collection. "Miss Prosaic," was the Royal conclusion.

The wit in the background thought that her name was Banks, to the delight of his audience.

The Princess smiled round on the company broadly. "Here is one who holds her own against me," she said, indicating Ella with a nod. "She makes a nice change for me." A lovely piece of Valenciennes caught her eye. "That iss nice!" she exclaimed, gloating over it.

The Duchess raised her lorgnon. "It is your own, ma'am," she said.

"Iss it?" The Princess peered at the label. "So it iss! I lent it, I see." She waved her pince-nez at Ella. "You veel make me some more just like it, yes?" She asked the impossible, then smiled indulgently.

Ella smiled too. "It might be done, your Royal Highness," she answered, "with the right conditions. Valenciennes is not an inaccessible fastness."

"You know then of conditions? You know that the *vraie valenciennes* cannot be made outside the walls?"

A pillow with a piece of lace begun on it caught her eye, and

as she spoke the Princess began without thinking of what she was doing, to twirl the bobbins.

"Your Royal Highness is a lacemaker!" Ella exclaimed.

The Princess became aware of what she was doing. "Oh, yes," she modestly acknowledged with a little disconcerted laugh. "I make lace. And my mother and my grandmother. We all make lace. And I would like to see every young lady make lace as once so many did. Every young lady who could. But some have not the hand for any kind, and some have the *haleine grasse* and can only work in black. But what more beautiful heirloom for a family to treasure than the exquisite work of an ancestress! If only the young ladies who are now wasting their time on everything made easy would concentrate on this one lovely art, they might leave to their families lace by which they would be remembered with loff and pride, for hundreds of years. Duchess, you will let this sweet child learn?"

"Oh, I should so love to, ma'am!" Lady Ann exclaimed.

The Duchess bowed to the Royal request.

"You would not teach the *point picotée*?" the Princess asked Ella tentatively.

"To one of the craft in confidence," Ella replied.

"So! The freemasonry of the craft, yes! You feel it? *Gut!* I understand."

"Your Royal Highness can command," Ella said.

"My Royal Highness asks the favour, as one of the craft."

Thus delicately, and by the way as it were, did the great lady accomplish her mission. Ella was launched. She might count her pupils now by the space she had at her command to accommodate them, as accurately as if they stood in a row before her waiting for seats; and as to her customers, she might have numbered them by the hundred confidently.

But the Princess's thoroughness was not yet satisfied. The next few minutes she employed in examining two very fine lappets. There was a difference of opinion as to the make. They might be Brussels or old Devonshire. The Princess observed the openwork "finishings." In design they were identical and equally well-worked, yet one was far less beautiful than the other.

"Both would be called imitation because they were not made two hundred years ago," Ella said. "I venture to call this"—indicating the more lovely of the two—"a revival. I cannot

myself detect any difference between it and the piece I copied."

"Your own work then? Beautiful! But why this stupid cotton? I see one in cotton, the other thread."

"To show the inferiority of cotton to thread," Ella explained. "Both materials are the finest of their kind that I could procure. The thread was years old."

The Princess nodded comprehension, and quoted the saying: "'Wool may be kept to dust, flax to silk.'" Then proceeded: "Made in the dark by hand, the thread, yes? Must be hand-made. Machine-made thread is not to be compared. And they do tell me"—she spoke impressively, addressing the assembly generally—"that there are ladies—*ladies*—who wear cotton lace!"

Several faces reddened at this. The ladies who were wearing cotton lace, and those who did not know cotton from thread and might be wearing it, were covered with confusion; but confusion does not hide cotton lace, and there was considerable uneasiness.

The Princess went on unconcernedly, pausing often, and dropping comments: "*Point d'Alençon,* Queen of laces, the only French lace not made on a pillow. Brussels *point gaze*—beautiful! Horsehair not used for the *feston*—outline, isn't it, yes?" This to Ella. "It is the horsehair that makes the *point d'Alençon* crisper. It washes bad, though."

The Venice section drew from her many exclamations. "Those splendid guipures! But giff me rose point!"

"What's she at?" Ballard and Sarb whispered to Mr. Harkles.

"Rose point—there—don't you see the roses?" Mr. Harkles rejoined in haste.

Necks were craned to see, and imagination, working on the unhappy suggestion, discovered the "roses." But one practical woman, who had pushed to the front on the heels of the Dowager Lady Callowabbey, was not satisfied. Seeing's believing, and she held to the converse. "Which are the roses? I don't see them," she repeated with such irritating persistency that at last the Duchess turned on her and snapped: "Rose means raised, my good woman."

The good woman's appearance in that crowd owed its distinction to subtle differences which betrayed that though in it she was not of it. The Duchess, who could read such differences as she ran, asked Lady Callowabbey in a whisper, who the "person" was. Lady Callowabbey replied: "Filmer Dabbs woman.

Bound to buy. Tap of the Bayswater wealth. Brought her to turn it on."

Mr. Harkles retired into the background to repent his haste at leisure. He was likely to hear more of those "roses." In the background the frivolous, to beguile the time, were passing terms in lace about with a twist. A scuffle was in progress. A lath of a man, known as the Sliver, with his hands on his stomach, was pretending to writhe. Mr. Harkles inquired into the nature of his trouble.

"*Punti in aria,*" the Sliver groaned. "Col Drindon—I only asked what it meant, and Col Drindon said, '*Punchee in aria*? I'll show you!' And gave me one in the wind with his fist."

"Strained, but not out of all semblance," Mr. Harkles commented, smiling benevolently, like a pleased father who sees promise in a clever child, and encourages it with a pat, but judiciously, that self-satisfaction may not bar improvement.

4

The Princess's minute inspection was outlasting everybody's patience, and boredom had set in, as may be inferred from the level to which their wit had descended. "When's the fun going to begin?" the youngsters were asking each other. The poor little Duchess, who was dropping with fatigue, voiced the general feeling. "There seems to be a great deal to say about lace," she sighed plaintively.

The Princess laughed her fat, jolly laugh. She had no pity on any of them. Her own interest in the affair was genuine. To do something for somebody was her greatest pleasure in life, and she had many useful irons in the fire, to all of which she attended punctually; and having consented to do what she could for lace, she would have done her best, even if the lace-maker had been a nonentity. That was her way. And now, with Ella's beauty and charm—influences to which she was peculiarly susceptible—to stimulate her, she was bent, if possible, on doing better than her usual best. She knew her business, and she knew her own importance and the weight attached to her every word when it should filter through the gossips to "the backbone of the country," where Royalty is still reverenced as the symbol which vouches for the stability of things in general. She and Ella were enjoying the freemasonry of their

craft. From the moment the Princess had confessed herself a lacemaker, their talk had become technical. Much of it was in an undertone that could not be overheard, but every now and then their eloquence, overheated by the interest of their theme, went off pop, as it were, and startled their audience with phrases that roused curiosity without satisfying it, for no one dared interrupt with a question. The ladies, although many of them vaunted rich stores of lace, and pretended knowledge, were too apathetic intellectually to trouble themselves to master the subject for nothing, and only vaguely knew one kind from another; but now, seeing profit in it if it were to be the thing, they determined to patronise it with their attention.

Among the exhibits were some lace-pillows of various ages and shapes. One had been placed apart, out of reach of the kind of person who will finger things. It was made of pale blue satin and had ivory bobbins mounted in gold, dangling from an unfinished piece of work which was still pinned to the pattern.

"I know that pillow!" the Princess exclaimed. She read the label: "'Lent by his Grace the Duke of Castlefield Saye.' I thought so. I remember. He showed it to me once when I was staying with you, Duchess."

"It was his grandmother's," the Duchess said. "I did not know that he had lent it."

For a reason she could not have explained, she was annoyed that the Duke should have lent his grandmother's pillow, especially without telling her, and she was more annoyed still because she had betrayed her annoyance. "The Brabant ladies were all lacemakers," she added, trying to cover the slip. "You may remember my sister-in-law, Alicia——"

"Oh, yes, well. I often came here to see her. How she would have loffed all this!" The Princess indicated the whole room with a sweeping gesture, and again peered into the pattern on the pillow. "Pathetic," escaped her. "Such loffly work, and never to be finished!"

"This young person may take it upon herself to finish it," the Duchess said indifferently. But the animus underlying the suggestion did not escape Ella. A shade of resentment clouded her face for an instant, chased away by an extra show of animation. But something in the pose she fell into at the moment arrested the Princess's attention. A gleam of interest, of inquiry flashed from her eyes, and was suppressed.

"By the way," she said in a casual tone, putting her pince-nez

together with a snap that seemed to indicate an end to her interminable inspection, and raised the spirits of her retinue from below zero! "By the way, was that grandmother the beautiful lady whose portrait hangs in the Duke's study at Castlefield Saye? I loffed to look at that portrait. It is now hid behind a curtain."

"So it is," said the Duchess, as if she had not realised this to be the case until the Princess mentioned it.

In the background Col Drindon crossed sticks with Ballard and Sarb, thrust and parried. The pantomime was understood to indicate fencing. The Princess had thrust and the Duchess had parried. A question asked and evaded was apprehended. Why had Good Gracious fenced? But they did not really care to know. They just asked each other and went on, like jesting Pilate, without waiting for an answer.

The answer was simple enough. The Duchess did not know why her husband had had the picture covered up, but she would not say so. She would not satisfy the curiosity even of Royalty at the expense of her wifely dignity, which, early Victorian as she was, she felt would have been compromised had she told the truth and thereby made it appear that she did not enjoy her husband's confidence in full.

The Princess passed on to another subject inconsequently, as if she attached no importance either to question or answer.

"Your Exhibition is never to be forgotten," she said to Ella, raising her voice. "I shall come again. I hope everyone will come again. And again. It is wonderful what you haff done. Yet I think you haff only begun. You mean to do more, much more, yes?"

"Even the poor lacemakers might do something for England, your Royal Highness," Ella ventured. "If England would do her duty by the lacemakers. Lace can be patriotic."

"As how?" said the Princess, drawing her on.

"I would remind your Royal Highness," Ella began diffidently—"Flanders, in the sixteenth century. During the religious persecution. When every other art fled, lace alone was loyal, and lace saved Flanders from utter ruin." She hesitated, but the Princess smiled and nodded encouragement, and Ella added what she wanted to say: "Colbert used to say that Fashion was to France what the mines of Peru were to Spain."

The Princess again nodded approval several times. "You would make lace the Fashion, yes?" she said.

"It would be good for England to have a lace of its own, a real *point d'Angleterre*——"

"Surely you know, Ella Banks, that there is a real old *point d'Angleterre,* very beautiful," the Duchess interrupted.

"If your Grace will excuse me," Ella replied, deferentially but also firmly, "not in the sense I mean. The lace known as *point d'Angleterre* was not English. It was *point de Bruxelles* made in France and elsewhere by Flemish workers, and smuggled into England to be sold as *point d'Angleterre,* after the English Parliament, in 1662, prohibited the sale of foreign lace. England has always been celebrated for selling more lace than she can produce."

"And what would be English in the sense you mean?" the Princess asked.

"I mean in the sense in which lace has given expression in other countries to the national feeling, in each age, for beauty; the national sentiment and feeling for art. In these respects each day has found the means to express itself in lace. You can tell the period by the designs. The Art Spirit of the times is preserved in texture and pattern, a faithful record, and imperishable."

"You would not preserve the Art Spirit of the nineteenth century, would you?" the Princess objected.

"The sense of beauty cannot be lost." Ella answered her indirect condemnation indirectly. "It is suspended at times, and then only feeble reproductions from imperfect recollections appear. But even when Art is in eclipse and beauty suffers degradation in the darkness, one here and there is inspired by the creative spirit and lights a little lamp which exposes at once both the pass to which Beauty has fallen and a way out. Beauty has always her lovers. Love is the creative spirit——"

"Ach, yes, I see!" cried the Princess. "The desire of Loff is for Beauty, and their union is fruitful. No beautiful thought takes shape without Loff. Loff is the progenitor of all beauty—beauty of mind, of character, of expression, of word and thought and deed. Intellect may traffic in ugliness, it often does and calls it Art to excuse it, but Loff neffer! Brain without heart falls an easy prey to every ugliness in life. The heart is the home of Beauty. And given brain as well as heart, the two working together, but Loff dominant——" She stopped short abruptly, and, with a large gesture, clasped to her breast in ecstasy, the inexpressible result.

Smart Society in the background was shocked that she should make such an exhibition of herself. They enjoyed an *équivoque* delicately suggested, but blushed at a serious allusion to the higher things of life. Their sense of shame was inverted. Salacity, cloaked by a careful choice of words and decorated with wit, delighted them; but to touch without laughter on morals or religion, was to their mind an indecency which made them feel that they "didn't know where to look."

"I must hear more of this," the Princess concluded. "And you must come and see my lace. I will send for you." She paused and smiled, with admiring eyes on Ella. "You are the Genius of Lace," she said. "I hope to see the lacemaker honoured as an artist in England, like in Holland when in refuge, after the passing of the Edict of Nantes."

She held out her hand, and Ella, sinking to the ground in a deep curtsey, kissed it. It was prettily done, but caused much comment; yet what else was there for it? Ella could not shake the Royal hand, neither could she ignore it.

The Duchess, as they drove away, was tart on the subject to Lady Ann. She noticed that Ella's back was never turned to Royalty, and that her own hand was instantly ready in the right position, back uppermost, for the Royal hand to rest upon, as if she had expected the honour and accepted it as a matter of course.

"Where does the girl learn these things!" the Duchess exclaimed. "*Somebody* must coach her. You would think she had been prepared to be presented at Court."

"Mother dear," Lady Ann answered, laughing, "I do believe, if Ella Banks had made a mistake, you would have liked her better."

"It would have been more natural in her position and considering who she is," the Duchess declared. "Curtseying like a *débutante* at a Drawing-room! It looked like a rehearsal. If the Princess aspires. . . . I don't think it will be well for her if this gets out. . . . It would certainly not be approved——" A significant nod indicated by Whom. "Ambitions in that direction are not approved. She is a good woman, most self-sacrificing. But there is such a thing as taking too much upon oneself." She sat silent for a little, frowning on the populace, then burst out again. "That girl is all presumption. These people must be kept in their proper place, not encouraged. They

are invading the very Court itself. And that is what she is aiming at. You will see."

Ella Banks of Red Rose Farm—at Court! To little Lady Ann such a possibility would have been unthinkable if it had not been suggested. But her faith in her mother carried conviction, and her mother's tone carried conviction far enough to show cause for fear. Lady Ann saw a radiant vision of Ella Banks, calm, confident—the Winged Victory—swooping down on the throne, and the throne itself tottering to its fall in consequence.

But glimpses of possible disaster threatening could only momentarily disturb Lady Ann, as an ill-bred person might disturb her by being intrusive; and her way was the same with the one and the other. She swept the glimpse from her mind, ignored the person, and carelessly pursued her pleasure of the moment. An epitome of her caste in all time, she felt secure in the established order of good and evil, considered that if there were people not equally well-satisfied with things as they are, those people were in the wrong and must be brought to heel; and, viewing the process from the height of a position whence unpleasant details were not visible to the naked eye, she indignantly set aside as impertinent any difference of opinion on the subject that might reach her, and was not to be warned.

The vision of Ella as Democracy incarnate swamping the throne, passed in a flash, and was succeeded by a doubt of vital importance. She was keen to learn lacemaking. Would her mother object?

"But I may take lessons!" she exclaimed inconsequently.

"You must," her mother answered, "though I think you need not have been dragged into it. Why were you in such a hurry to speak?"

"I want to learn."

"There is no getting out of it now, at any rate, without offending the Princess, which would annoy your father, and be highly inconvenient. You've committed yourself," her mother reproached her irritably. "But *I* shall not go near that horrid girl again. On that I am determined."

CHAPTER VII

FIRST FRUITS OF A SUCCESSFUL OCCASION

1

THERE was no general exodus when the Royal party withdrew. It was only then indeed that business began. Ella found herself hemmed in on every side by purchasers, who, ignoring Miss Hildenborough, tried to deal with her direct. Women wanted to have a good look at her, men's admiring eyes were faithless to every other beauty in the room, and to have speech with one whom Royalty had distinguished with marked attention was the thing of the moment. It was almost a scrimmage. Some of the men, among them the dapper little Marquis of Ballard and Sarb, shouldered great ladies aside in order to get near her, but did not succeed in attracting her attention.

Col Drindon had determined to make her acquaintance, and watchfully awaited a favourable opportunity, standing at gaze, spiritually adoring her, his flower, a gorgeous amaryllis lily, pressed to his lips, but Lady Ballard and Sarb, small, vivacious, brown as a gipsy, and of uncertain temper, to whom he was vowed just then, misdoubted the nature of his adoration, and jealously claimed him. Lady Ballard and Sarb had satisfied him until now. There was a time, indeed, when he had thought of her as an angel chained to a brute. Closer acquaintance had spoilt the angel ideal, but there was the next rank, in which she had remained to figure in his dreams—"Still, with all her faults, a Woman!" Now, in the reaction caused by her tactless intrusion on the fine fervour of higher experience, she suddenly stood revealed to him as "fleshly lusts that war against the soul." He had cherished her hitherto as his Laura. Her name was Maud, but young Petrarch must have his Laura. But in this moment of spiritual illumination he saw her as others saw her, thought of her as Lady Brandy and Soda, and his soul sickened of her. Ella's immediate effect upon him had been cleansing; he felt that he stood in need of purification. Lady Brandy and Soda must be got rid of, but the situation was one to be dealt with tactfully.

"Will you put me down at my Club, dear lady?" he whispered.

"But you are coming to lunch with me," she said. "Alone—you know."

"To-day?—Impossible! The gates of Paradise are shut," he answered. "You don't know what a publisher is. He only respects a poet as potential pounds, shillings, and pence, and won't wait for him if he delays long enough to interfere with other interviews, especially if they are of more golden promise, which is likely to be the case. Poetry does not appeal to the pocket."

"Why don't you write a good novel, Colf" Lady B. and S. urged, moved by the golden allusion. Money she stood in chronic need of, he had enough and never bothered himself to make more, but that she did not remember; neither did the suggestion of an interview pending at his club with a publisher appear to her to be unlikely. He was for quitting the danger zone, that was the important thing; and she was too glad of it to be critical of his clumsy excuse for deserting her.

"Good novels write themselves," he answered curtly, "and anyway, I must go. Will you take me, or shall you wait for B. and S.?"

She shrugged her shoulders, with a significant grimace, and they drove off together.

Half an hour later the poet, relieved of his incubus, was back in the shrine, standing as though he had never moved, the gorgeous amaryllis held to his lips, in rapt contemplation.

But not rapt enough to exclude a source of keen dissatisfaction. The flower was no longer appropriate. It should have been cast aside with Lady B. and S. Why had he not thought of it sooner? A madonna lily! He should have bought a pure madonna lily, on his way back. That was the one emblem of the new influence which was uplifting him like sacred music, inspiring him to sacred song.

2

Ella, with questions showering on her from every side, and Miss Hildenborough at her elbow resisting attempts to bargain, appealing to her about prices, taking down orders as fast as she could write them, which had immediately to be amended and even cancelled in compliance with the whims of the undecided—Ella was somewhat excited, but she did not lose her head. Nobly disciplined, and although inwardly quaking, she controlled herself to speak deliberately, to move slowly, to remain outwardly composed in the midst of the throng. She had reckoned on

her appearance as part of her stock-in-trade, and had imagined herself the centre of attraction in just such a crowd. But unpleasant contingencies do not usually appear in daydreams, and there was much to try her in the actual experience.

Determined to have a word with her, Col Drindon hung about, waiting for the luncheon hour which was bound to empty the Exhibition and give him an opportunity. By chance he stood at the door of her sitting-room, so that when at last she made for it, they found themselves face to face. Col, hat in one hand, and lily in the other, bowed low, but stood his ground.

"May I trouble you to let me pass?" Ella said politely.

"Nothing you could ask me to do for you would be a trouble," he answered seriously.

"Then you will let me pass?" she said, showing impatience.

"Excuse me," he pleaded. "Just a moment! May I say—" at a loss what to say, he tapped his lips with the lily for inspiration, and glanced round.

She tried to help him. "You like my Exhibition," she suggested.

"Oh, yes, immensely," he assured her. "Everything about you is beautiful. Beauty flows from the beautiful. . . . If a poet might venture to make an appropriate offering"—he held the flower out to her. He had carried it all day in a hot hand, but was too intent upon her to notice the result. Ella glanced at the wilted remains with distaste, and put her hand behind her. "Only a simple flower," he pleaded affectedly. "You would not refuse a simple flower!"

"Is it a flower?" she said, gently ironical.

He looked at it then himself, and the colour flew to his face. With an exclamation, he flung it on the floor, and stamped on it.

"I deserve your contempt!" he exclaimed. "Forgive me, if you can. I didn't notice that the flower had faded."

"It is unlucky to give a faded flower," she said, sorry for him, repentant herself, and anxious to make amends. "It would have been bad luck for you if I had accepted it. I should be sorry to bring you bad luck."

"Thank you!" he exclaimed effusively. "Cruel to be kind. I understand."

She made a move to pass on. He opened the door for her, bowed her into her sitting-room, and shut himself out. But she gave him a smile with her thanks as she passed him, to salve his mortification. He had made himself ridiculous with his faded

offering. All the same, he was a personable young man, and might be pleasant when he was not ridiculous. That was her only distinct conclusion with regard to him.

3

The Princess's doings that morning were not gazetted, but that was nothing; her doings were often not gazetted. No Royal lady ever kept herself more successfully out of the *Court Journal* when she chose, or was better advertised when privacy was not her object. She had made the Exhibition a private affair in order to secure the best advertisement for it. To be privileged and exclusive was the ambition of the kind of people who had been asked, and they could be trusted not to be silent about anything that vouched for their own importance. Therefore, although the event was not mentioned in the evening papers, it was much discussed in social circles, where words let fall by the influential, breed, like microbes, at a preposterous rate.

"Did you go to the Show this morning?" was the question.

"Which Show?"

"The Intensive Culture of Lace."

The reply was one of Col Drindon's happy hits, which immediately caught on, and produced the desired crop of gossip. Those who had not been to the Show felt themselves all out of it, and looked up to those who were "in it," for information. Of necessity, all the babble followed the event which usually follows a Society Function. But to this event there was a special interest attached. There was Ella herself. Affable Bosc knew what he was about when he decided that it would be a mistake to vulgarise her by advertisement, like scents and soaps and cigarettes. The difficulty would have been to keep her concealed. There are plenty of beautiful women in London always, but only at long intervals does one leap to the front with the bound that makes history. Mr. Julius Harkles was great on the subject, and in general request. One must use the jargon of his set to do justice to any of its members, and in that jargon he had spotted the Lacemaker for a winner the moment he set eyes on her. But he had done more. The Duchess's evident dislike of her was a fact to be accounted for in view of all that the Duchess was doing for her. Had she some hold over the Duchess?

The question was enough in itself to set Mr. Harkles's ingenious mind to work on a congenial line of inquiry directed towards a foregone conclusion. There must be more than lace in the matter to account for setting a lacemaker up so extravagantly. Joyfully Mr. Harkles caressed the supposition. It stood for so many delightfully scandalous possibilities. Gossip was the capital on which he throve socially. The latest news was his passport to the only heaven to which he aspired. To be first in the field with a fat new scandal was a distinction he coveted.

He was a man you met everywhere, though he had no special claim to be there. Society had picked him up without making inquiries about him, as a cyclone picks up a straw, and had gone on whirling him along with it ever since. His appearance and manner were his original passport, and age and experience had heightened these recommendations. A good-looking man and well made, he had, by careful living, fought against fat and preserved his figure. When his abundant hair turned grey, which was early, it added a touch of distinction to his appearance which was a help to him. He might have made a respectable career for himself had he given the time and care he bestowed on his dress to some more profitable purpose. He should have been a tailor. His talent was sartorial, and the greatest joy to him of all his successes was the credit he took to himself, deservedly, of having brought a certain tie into fashion and put a certain coat out. In this he was a lineal descendant of Beau Brummel and Count d'Orsay, but without their *éclat*. He had come too late for that. He had his admirers and imitators, but they, like himself, were a sort of survival, of no consequence today, when men must travel on hard metal, or be left behind—to fetch and carry for idle women, and play the agreeable. This was Mr. Harkles's avocation, and he had risen in it above all competitors. He spoke with a cultivated voice, was always amiable, never obtrusive, and looked like a gentleman, which made it nice to have him about. Elderly dowagers, who found him useful, said he was "a dear creature;" and certain of the younger women played him off on occasion against the younger men, "to bring them to their senses," or "to show them where they were." With these younger men he enjoyed some prestige. They said he knew "wot's wot" and "did the right thing." Though apparently without belongings, he had means enough "to do himself well," and other people too, when he chose.

Society has always a comfortable niche for such a man, espe-

cially when it is known that he never borrows and sometimes lends.

He had gained for himself the reputation of being able to put two and two together, as so many reputations of the kind are gained, by persistent assertion. Repetition has the effect here below that it is said to have in a higher sphere. By dint of saying "Trust me to put two and two together," he had come to be trusted. When any of those twos which add so much to the interest of idle lives were found too difficult of addition for anything to be arrived at, Mr. Harkles was invited to put them together and make the evidence complete. "What does old Julius say?" the formula ran. "Trust him to put two and two together!"

Late that night, Mr. Harkles appeared in the smoking-room at the Land and Leisure Club in which the younger members were usually to be found. Most of them had gone. A crowd of leather-covered armchairs and solid little tables, models of ugly utility, offered their ease in the vast empty space with a melancholy air, as though hopelessly waiting for employment. Lingering still were Lord Terry de Beach and Gregor Strangworth, seated apart. Some few young men, to wit Ballard and Sarb, The O'Haleron, Callowabbey, with his satellite, Filmer Dabbs, junior, and the Sliver, all intimate, were chatting together in a group of which Col Drindon was the centre. Col in an easy chair faced the fireplace, legs extended, head resting on the back of his chair, hands clasped under his head, eyes lifted to the ceiling. Mr. Harkles joined the group, and on hearing his voice, Col lowered his eyes to look at him, eyes heavy with drink.

"Hello! old *point de raccroc!*"[1] he said thickly.

Mr. Harkles found an upright chair, lit a cigar, and sat with his legs stretched out that his trousers might not be marked at the knees. He had never been seen in knee-marked trousers, but he never pulled them up, as some men do, to prevent the catastrophe. The standard he had set up for himself did not allow of any apparent care for his clothes.

"I don't see it," he said, in answer to Col.

"Aren't you always putting two and two together?" Col asked.

"Had you there, Harkles!" a man in the background snig-

[1] *Point de raccroc* is the lace stitch with which parts of a pattern are joined together.

gered facetiously. He was a small-headed, phenomenally slim young man, who looked as if nature had sharpened him to a point and fined him down so that he might slip in anywhere—the Sliver aforementioned. A circulating parasite, capable of attaching himself to and drawing sustenance from anybody, he would go to church three times a day and sin all night with equal complaisance, if his associates of the moment expected it of him. He was going into diplomacy, and in training as private secretary to an official at the Foreign Office. His father was Dean of Closeminster and a decent man, with interest enough earned by his own character and abilities (for he was not of good family) to push his son on. When the young man first appeared at the Land and Leisure Club, Col Drindon had exclaimed: "What a sliver!" and as the "Sliver" he had been known ever since. He found the sobriquet less of a handicap than his own name, which was Benjamin Hardwackle, and answered to it readily on that account.

Mr. Harkles tranquilly exhaled a mouthful of smoke.

Col tried again. "What price rose point, eh?" he lunged.

"What price the Winged Victory, eh?" Mr. Harkles parried.

"The Winged Victory!" Col exclaimed in tones eloquent of adoration, and closed his eyes.

Gregor Strangworth, scientist and traveller, joined the group at the moment. "According to the Arab proverb, when God wishes to destroy an ant, he gives it wings," he observed obscurely, with a didactic note in his voice, like a pedagogue imparting information. But his voice was the voice of a gentleman. Also he was a fine-looking man, not handsome, but with an unmistakable air of distinction the reverse of pedagogic.

"Are you prophesying?" Mr. Harkles asked.

Strangworth ignored the question.

"I'd rather have her for a cousin than an aunt," little Lord Callowabbey jested feebly.

"I'd take her round in any capacity, but it's blue roses in my case," Ballard and Sarb sighed.

"Blue roses," Col caught him up. "Water well with ginger-beer, that's the tip."

This fatuity was received with the respect it merited.

Old Lord Terry de Beach, ex-guardsman, pot-bellied, spindle-shanked, bald as a bonze, and shaky, strode up on his stork legs with a glass in his hand. So far as the points mentioned go, an Ally Sloper might be imagined, but Lord Terry de Beach

was not otherwise in appearance like that once well-known Victorian contemporary unworthy, whatever he might be in character. He had the straight, delicately-modelled nose with flapping nostrils of the well-bred of his caste. His dull, too prominent eyes looked out from under shaggy white eyebrows, which, except when he leered, were drawn down in a sheltering frown that took from his eyes their ugly prominence. His chin and jaw were clean-cut; and a heavy, bristling, white moustache, trained up towards his temples, concealed his loose mouth, and gave a final touch of picturesqueness to his face. Had his complexion been darker and his baldness concealed by a turban, he would have passed for a Sikh of high rank and long lineage. A fighting man, he had done his duty as he understood it, gallantly, in every skirmish that he could get himself into so long as he remained in the service. No faithful portrait can be made of him without his oaths. They were inherent in his talk; characteristic both of the man and his day. In their variety and the ease with which he used them, he was abreast of his late friend and sometime Commander-in-Chief. He spoke in a grating, authoritative voice: "What's there about this (*et cetera*) Lace Girl that's making everyone sit up?" he asked between two sips of whisky and soda.

"Atmosphere," Col answered sententiously.

Mr. Harkles withdrew his cigar and blew a long ribbon of smoke from his mouth. The action seemed rather to question than to confirm the word.

"And what the deuce is that?" De Beach wanted to know.

Col took no notice, Mr. Harkles repeated the business with his cigar, watched by the attentive group; but it was Mr. Strangworth who spoke.

"Atmosphere is a subtle emanation from a powerful personality," he said, delivering himself of the pronouncement with the decision of an oracle.

But old Lord Terry demanded information. "Talk sense," he grumped. "Who is the girl? What is she like? Where did she come from? Is she respectable?"

"At present," Ballard and Sarb said significantly.

Mr. Harkles pricked up his ears. "Oh, surely," he exclaimed, "the respectability of a *protégée* of the Duchess of Castlefield Saye cannot be questioned!"

"Can't it!" Ballard and Sarb said dryly.

The subtle suggestion would have acted but for Mr. Strang-

worth, who, standing on the hearthrug facing the group, countered it and distracted their minds from the point with a flood of general information: "Respectable, of course," he began emphatically. "Lacemaking tends to respectability. It is interesting to observe the ethics of employment. You may rely on finding carpenters decent, worthy men; but French polishers are unsteady. Why this should be is a question that I hope to settle myself. I am collecting statistics. In women the love of that peculiarly feminine implement, the needle, is symptomatic. Also it is hygienic. The attitude of the whole body which sewing necessitates, and the steady rise and fall of the arm, have a healthy effect on the—er—that centre, in fact, of a woman's being, the condition of which determines her conduct. I do not say that all lacemakers are necessarily moral. The conditions under which they are forced to work must also be taken into account, and these, especially on the Continent, were often bad enough to produce morbid results. Hence it was argued that lacemaking was a pernicious employment. That this was an erroneous confounding of cause and effect is amply proved by the beneficial results on the general health of the workers which have supervened in our day on the amelioration of the conditions under which their work is done; particularly when to sanitary workrooms is added a living wage. As in other cases, however, lacemakers find this last necessity the hardest to wring from employers. No article of feminine adornment has ever been produced at a severer cost of suffering than lace, and that is saying a great deal. If each piece could tell its tale of torture, very little lace would be worn."

Signs of restiveness here showed that his listeners had had enough, but Mr. Strangworth persisted: "Still and withal," he said, "the character of the lacemaker stands high. Nicolo d'Aristotile inscribes his book to ladies and young girls, who, he says, will learn to do from it all the fancy-work that a virtuous woman can with a needle in her hand. For ages lacemaking has held its own as the employment *par excellence* of *virtuose donne*. For this reason the lacemaker is eagerly sought in marriage. From all of which I should argue that this young person of whom you speak, is good as well as beautiful, one altogether whom it would be to the credit of a respectable duchess to patronise."

Stopping short, Mr. Strangworth surveyed the group with an enigmatical expression, which passed unobserved, except by

Lord Terry de Beach, who, glancing from the speaker's face to the ceiling, winked one eye. Mr. Strangworth observed the wink, and the shadow of a smile, like a gleam of sunshine on a sombre day, flecked the stolidity of his face. Between him and Lord Terry de Beach there was the understanding of old friends.

The Land and Leisure Club was an old-established, aristocratic institution run by men of birth, who hung together; but they admitted specimens of lower castes for various reasons. They honoured literature and art in the person of a man who was at the top of his own tree, and "did him well," for they were hereditary patrons of literature and art, and flattered themselves that they were born connoisseurs; and they held to precedent and tradition before everything. Military heroes and men of daring in any line were made specially welcome and respected as a sort of off-shoot of aristocracy. Strangworth had been elected on this footing. By tradition, a renowned traveller is a good sportsman, and he might, had he chosen, have sat secure on a pedestal in the Land and Leisure Club. He had only to do one of two things, hold his tongue—the less he said the better for his credit—or he might have talked big game and told traveller's stories, the bigger the game and the more travellerish the stories the better, especially after dinner. But Strangworth neither held his tongue nor laid himself out to amuse. He had a teasing trick of imparting information, and would break into a conversation and squash the most juicy plums of gossip with solid facts. Yet men stood him; they could not say why. In his absence they vowed they'd "not let the old blighter jaw again," "they'd not stand the old bore," but somehow he obliged them to stand him as often as he chose.

Because his initials were G. S. they called him "Great Scott!" and "Great Scott!" the word would go round if he were glimpsed in the distance: "We shall all get the information we don't want now!" The nickname being an expletive, was convenient; there was no risk of its being spotted by anyone not in the know. None of them ventured to call Mr. Strangworth anything disrespectful to his face. They had no reason for thinking it, but in their general attitude they acknowledged that he was not a man to take liberties with. Nobody wanted his information as a rule, but on the present occasion something profitable was to be got out of his prosing, for if lace were the coming fad it was advisable to pick up wrinkles on the subject

when you could. "Must get up the patter, else you're all out of it." That was the use of clubs. "When a subject crops up you hear fellows talk and pick up enough to keep you going without the fag of reading a syllable; and for posting you on anything out of the way, old Inquire Within is A1."

Lord Terry de Beach, who had listened to Mr. Strangworth's harangue with an amused smile for which the matter did not account, slopping whisky and soda from his glass with his palsied hand the while, burst out at the conclusion with an appreciative oath.

It appeared that he took no stock in *virtuose donne.*

Heads were thrown back at this, and mouths opened in silent significant laughter. The old reprobate, enjoying the sweets of a brief popularity, was about to say more, but in the exhilaration of the moment, shooting out his arm energetically to emphasise his next point, he dashed the contents of his tumbler full in the face of Filmer Dabbs, junior.

"Oh, I say, old chap, hold on," Filmer exclaimed, groping up his sleeve for his handkerchief.

His rasping, common voice jarred the more unpleasantly for its contrast with the mellow refinement of the general tone.

Not another young man among them would have called Lord Terry de Beach "old chap." His ways were far from impeccable, and his antics at times were undignified; but antic manners may proclaim a jester without by any means indicating a fool; and the proof that Lord Terry was no fool lay in the fact that he held his own with men of all ages and ranks in the Club, and, even in the intimate association with the younger scamps to which he was addicted, was not felt to let himself down.

But a "rank outsider" never knows where to draw the line, and Filmer Dabbs, junior, was a "rank outsider," whom the Land and Leisure Club only tolerated to oblige Callowabbey, who found him useful. Up to a certain point Callowabbey himself was "My dear fellow" with Filmer, but let Filmer shock any of Callowabbey's caste prejudices, and Callowabbey let him know, don't you know—just a look and a word in the ancestral manner, nothing you could lay hold of, but stinging like the flick of a whip. The whole group let him know it when he called Lord Terry de Beach "old chap." The look was unanimous. Col Drindon, Lord Terry de Beach's cousin, adopted nephew, heir, and very dear boy, sprang out of apathy to attention and glared. Lord Terry himself spoke the word.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" he said, raising his eyebrows.

That was the last of Filmer Dabbs, junior, for that night. He could not have been more alone in their midst if he had been invisible; but he was persistent, and "stuck it out."

The rebuke was honoured with a short silence. Ballard and Sarb was the first to speak. He was sore from his unavailing attempts to attract Ella's attention.

"I found that show this morning devilish slow," he said.

"But the girl?" said Lord Terry de Beach.

"Frozen music, that's what I call her," Ballard and Sarb rejoined.

"Frozen mutton," Lord Terry growled, contemptuous of fanciful speech. "I want to know what's it mean, settin' a common workgirl up, like a fine lady playin' at shopkeepin'."

"But she's not a common workgirl," Mr. Harkles corrected him. "That's just the puzzle. She's uncommon. She'd be uncommon put her where you like."

This was the opinion of those who had seen her, but they all agreed that they couldn't place her. Mr. Harkles was watching for an opportunity to get in a potent word of suggestion. Col Drindon gave him the chance. Looking out into vacancy, he uttered the enigmatical words: "Pure esthetic emotion made visible."

"Which thing is a mystery," Mr. Harkles followed on suggestively with eyes discreetly lowered.

Mystery was the right word with which to tonic their curiosity. Mr. Harkles had given the Corner House the best advertisement it could have for a *succes de scandal*.

CHAPTER VIII

GETTING UNDER WEIGH

1

ADAPTABLE Bosc had retired to his office, but came in again towards closing time on Ella's opening day, and late as it was, found the showroom full—but not of the "real people." They, and the morning had gone together. These were the "would-be's," as Mr. Bosc's experienced eye detected at a glance—detected with approval. They paid.

Mr. Bosc stood contemplating the crowd, twitching his nose the while like an observant rabbit in a juicy lettuce-bed, well-satisfied with the prospect. He recognised the importance of detail, and delighted to master the most minute, however remote its bearing on the business in hand. It might have been supposed that the business he had to transact for Ella Banks would not have made it necessary for him to take up the subject of lace. He knew nothing about lace when he made her acquaintance, but by this time he knew every piece in the collection, its history, so far as its history was to be known, and its value; and he bent over each specimen now, examining it anew with elaborate attention, and making appropriate remarks to such of his acquaintance—and they were many—as accosted him.

"Is there any human product more wonderful than lace?" he would ask, "both for its beauty, its value, and the associations which cling about it. It is the most aristocratic of possessions, consecrated by religion, and at one time the monopoly of Royalty. Here is a marvellous piece of 'nun's work.' Sixty years it took to complete it. Only think! Two generations and more. When one worker went blind or died another was ready to take up the needle; ready to sacrifice her eyes, and it might be her life, to the sacred task. Lent, you see, by the Church. There is nothing like it to be had now for love or money, you say? Well, there soon will be, if only you support this enterprise. Talk about genius! I assure you it is the Genius of Lace herself in person whom the Duchess of Castlefield Saye has discovered and placed at the head of this establishment. Not a stitch but she can do as exquisitely as it has ever been done, and she has even rediscovered much of the Art that was lost. She will never be able to do enough herself to supply the demand? No, but she can teach. She has already done so, successfully. Her workers have not yet arrived, but they are coming. It will greatly add to the interest of the Exhibition, to have the girls here, busy with needle and bobbin, demonstrating their Art. Unique Exhibition, is it not? Have you secured anything? First come, first served, you know. I have been so fortunate as to obtain the promise of a reproduction of this lovely piece of Ancient Devonshire. Just the thing for my mother. Devon, Buckingham, and Bedford have been celebrated for their bone lace—and other countries—since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But Devon is *the* country. The

secluded valleys of Devon still sustain the ancient reputation of 'English Point.' It is of Flemish origin, of course, brought over by the refugees who fled from the persecution of Alva, 1568-77."

So the long, lean figure passed on from one to another, lecturing all the time.

"We must get lace into the air, my dear mother," he had said. "That is the way to help her." And here he was, at the end of a long day, adding "her" interests to his already heavy burden of work. And "my dear mother" guessed where he was and thoughtfully postponed dinner. So long as a woman knows where her man is, and has a clue to what he is doing, she patiently acquiesces; it is uncertainty that breeds discontent and all the other disagreeables. But Mrs. Bosc, while she waited, pondered deeply, weighing pros and cons. The tone in which that "her," so often mentioned of late, was uttered, cast a suggestive shadow on her acute mind. Aloysius had been charged with the guardianship of young women before now, and had honourably acquitted himself. He would never acquit himself anything but honourably. And had even exceeded his duty disinterestedly in other cases; but no "her" had he ever before so often discussed, and never a one of them in that same tone. Mrs. Bosc sighed and appealed to our Lady of Succour. What has to be will be, and she would cheerfully resign herself: "Only, Blessed Lady, let it be for his good! Grant a mother's prayer, Holy Mother! His happiness is all I ask."

Beginning on the left of the entrance, Mr. Bosc slowly worked round to the right, and finally disappeared through the door into Ella's room.

He found her reclining in an easy-chair. She received him with a smile, but did not move. He carried his hat and stick in his left hand as usual, and held on to them after he had seated himself, which he did without waiting to be asked. There would have been less encouragement to make himself at home in a more formal greeting than there was in the look she gave him. By this time, in small things, Adaptable Bosc understood her.

"Well?" she said.

"Oh, very well," he answered; "very well indeed! You are the talk of the town."

"And my lace!" she grumbled.

"That by the way, of course," he assured her. "The greater includes the less."

He crossed one long, thin leg over the other, leant back in his chair, accommodated his hat and stick to his altered position, and twitched his nose.

"You are tired," he said.

"No," she answered. "Beveridge took it upon himself to empty the Show and shut up for an interval at luncheon-time, and we all had a rest. Miss Hildenborough and Mrs. Pilbeam have been indefatigable; but it has been hard work for them, and I am sorry I did not have more help."

"But has it not been hard work for you, too?" he asked her.

"It is my life," she answered, then added upon reflection: "Of course I know that it is their life, too, but with a difference. They haven't the prospect I have, to stimulate them."

"And the Princess was gracious?"

"To friendliness. And she said she would come again."

"Then she will," Mr. Bosc was sure.

"You know her?"

"I—er—yes. I meet her in the way of business. Her word is to be relied upon." Mr. Bosc slowly stroked his hat. He seemed to have no more to say, but he was only preparing to introduce another subject.

"You are personally acquainted with my client the Duke?" he observed.

"Is the Duke in London?" Ella asked quickly. "He did not come to-day."

"He is coming," Mr. Bosc replied. "Coming incognito. To escape the crowd—er—to escape the crowd."

He smoothed the crown of his hat with one finger.

"When?" she asked eagerly.

Mr. Bosc had begun to speak with reluctance, and his reluctance increased her eagerness. He was faithfully discharging an undertaking which, for some reason or other, was unpalatable. But Ella did not notice this.

"When there is nobody here," he answered her.

"That will be when the Show is closed," she said.

"If it suits your convenience," he answered, laying particular stress on *her* convenience.

"I shall be glad to see the Duke at any time," she said.

Mr. Bosc changed his position. "The Duke—er—likes to hide his light under a bushel," he pursued, speaking like one who with difficulty remembers what he has to say. "We all have our little foibles. He does not want his visit to be talked about.

Dukes are conspicuous personages. It is a relief to be free of publicity sometimes. Inconspicuous. The—er—newspapers are inquisitive. A quite private view is what the Duke asks for."

"I see," she said.

"I understand that you are prepared to receive the Duke incognito?"

"If it pleases his Grace."

Mr. Bosc's nose twitched. His eyes wandered over the floor, and continued to wander while he slowly gathered himself up and rose. There was a mingling of pride and humility in the gently spoken words which irritated him, a singular effect. But his task was not yet fully accomplished. He had still to make quite sure.

"The evening would be the best time for you—er—for *you*?" he asked, but the emphasis, which was meant to suggest a loophole of escape, was lost upon Ella.

"The Duke's own time," she answered. Then after a moment's hesitation, she asked: "Do you know at all when he will come?"

"Not at all," Mr. Bosc rejoined sourly. "In this matter his Grace has not favoured me with his confidence."

As Mr. Bosc drove home, he regretted these words. They were indiscreet. But why was the Duke reticent with regard to Ella Banks? Other matters he had always fully explained, but in her case he gave orders only, and in as few words as possible. And why this sudden uplifting of Ella's spirit at the prospect of meeting him? She showed no gladness when a visit from the Duchess was in question. Mr. Bosc was upset. By the twitching of his restless nose it was evident that he was upset.

2

During the days that followed, the Argus-Eyed, from her high desk behind the door, contemplated a crowd of customers with satisfaction, and congratulated herself on having got into a going concern.

"If it only lasts!" sighed Miss Hildenborough. "But I've been in Society ventures before, countenanced by Princesses and backed by Duchesses, and I know."

The Argus-Eyed nodded comprehension. "So do I," she said, "but there is hope for us here. Our Miss Banks isn't Society. She's business, and dratted good business, too."

"She doesn't look it," Miss Hildenborough objected.

"If she doesn't that's just her cleverness," said the Argus-Eyed. "But just you sit here and see her at it! She's dead set on holding her own, and she'll do it too, with 'em all."

"She'll be spoilt by the gentlemen."

"Not she! Prince or private, a gentleman's nothing to her but a cheque-book."

"You can't count on your feelings," said Miss Hildenborough. "There's such a thing as the heart. When the heart's touched, the head's not in it. She'll be courted and she's young."

"The courting will be done on the square then," said the Argus-Eyed. "Our Miss Banks ain't going to throw herself away."

"Not if she knows it," Miss Hildenborough conceded. "She's a good conceit of herself, and a right of it too. I should have if I was her. But there's such a thing as being taken in. You can't trust these swells. They're all alike."

"They ain't," the Argus-Eyed contradicted her. "They're not for doing harm, most of 'em, but now and again there comes a regular bad 'un, and it's him you've got to keep your eye on."

"You've got to keep your eye on 'em all till you spot him then, and that's not easy," said Miss Hildenborough. "They can be quite the gentleman, all respect and flummery, so long as it suits themselves. You don't always know when they're insulting you, they do it so politely."

"Well, I stick to it," said the Argus-Eyed. "Our Miss Banks is for making good money. The gentlemen as gentlemen she's got no use for."

"It's not natural," Miss Hildenborough replied. "Unless there's somebody in the background, which might well be."

"Very likely," the Argus-Eyed answered offhand. "That would be best, and we'll soon know. When it's 'tea for two in the sitting-room, and I'm not to be disturbed,' look out for someone you've never seen in the Show. Anyway I'm for standing by her. She's genuine good stuff, or I don't know what genuine good stuff is."

With which the Argus-Eyed returned to her ledger and totted up figures, and Miss Hildenborough, obedient to a sign from Ella in the distance, returned to her post as aide-de-camp.

3

Mrs. Filmer Dabbs, the counterpart of Madame Angot in appearance—

Handsome nearly,
Vulgar clearly—

had just come in with her two daughters, Mildred, a hard, showy, confident brunette, and Muriel, fair to insipidity, gentle, diffident, shrinking from the worldly crowd, intuitively, aware of its innate cruelty, glancing about with soft, dark pathetic eyes as though appealing for mercy.

Mrs. Filmer Dabbs was a would-be much countenanced at odd times by certain of the aristocracy, her husband being a crafty lawyer, who might be useful, don't you know. He could pull you out of a hole better than anybody, and would do it cheap if you kept in with him. He had got young Callowabbey out of a hole, in a burst of gratitude, because Callowabbey was civil to Filmer, junior. Dabbs *Mère,* of course, was too funny for words, but not a bad old thing really, when you knew her. . . . Thus self-interest excused itself but got less out of Mrs. Filmer Dabbs than it might. Had she been appreciated on her merits as a survival she would have ranked with certain works of art which were valued for the beauty of their ugliness. For she was really a precious specimen of a species daily growing rarer, thanks to the spread of education, the democratization of society, and adaptability in the third generation. She was a woman of influence in her own particular section of the "money gang," and on that account had been taken to the opening of the Lace Show by old Lady Callowabbey, an honour which had had the desired effect of enlisting Mrs. Dabbs's whole-hearted services in the interests of the enterprise. She had even tackled Lady Coombes, who Lady Callowabbey herself had not dared to tackle, although Lady Coombes was just as much a nobody to her as Mrs. Filmer Dabbs. Lady Coombes could tap a totally different, but really more important section of the "money gang," if she chose to use her influence,—rich women but not would-be's; women refined by generations of hereditary wealth, culture, and high-thinking, into an aristocracy of character more exclusive and jealous of intrusion than the aristocracy of rank itself. To secure Lady Coombes's co-operation was highly

important, but she was known to be difficult. A middle-class woman, wife of the best type of city merchant, who had received the honour of knighthood for valuable public service, she was satisfied with the many advantages of her solid, respectable position, and had no patience with Mrs. Dabbs's social aspirations. In appearance Lady Coombes was slender, elegant, refined, and elderly; but she had that faith in her own good looks which, so long as it lasts, is preservative and also hypnotic in effect, producing a like faith in the beholders. Freshness was the characteristic of her dress. She had never been seen in anything not perfectly fresh and the best of its kind, but quiet, and never brand-new to the eye. Everything about her was so ordered that she could enjoy her wealth to the full without advertising it. There was no stint in her large, long-established household, and no display. She was served with the exactness of servants rarely changed, who reflected her own restraint and efficiency. All about her goodness, beauty, and appropriateness created an atmosphere of comfort, peace, and confidence. There were no shams to be detected; all was reality. Lady Coombes could have boasted the possession of everything that makes life worth having—a pedigree untainted with disease, the refinement which generations of educated ancestors renders innate, the habitual command of ample means which produces a sense of security without the flaw of purse-pride;—everything, in fact, except high social position, Lady Coombes could have boasted, had she ever boasted, which she never did,—unless her attitude towards social positions considered better than her own, is to be taken as a kind of boast. She was satisfied that there was no social position better than her own, and she showed it. Bold, great ladies who ventured to offer the "City Woman" their social patronage, in order to obtain her wealthy co-operation in their schemes, retired discomfited from the attempt. She could do all the good that she desired to do, which was a great deal, independently. Great ladies who came in contact with her understood her at a word; she spoke in the same melodious tone, the same language, unemphatic, restrained without obscurity, because each simple word was weighted with sincerity. But Mrs. Filmer Dabbs had not the nicety of perception which distinguishes great ladies, whether they be great by birth, or great as Lady Coombes was great, in character, culture, and self-respect,—therefore Mrs. Filmer Dabbs burst in upon her immediately after the opening of the Lace Show, too elated by

the social promotion which she felt had been conferred upon her by Lady Callowabbey's patronage to realise herself as that lady's cat's-paw. Lady Coombes countenanced Mrs. Dabbs in order to keep in touch with Mrs. Dabbs's daughter, Muriel; the girl was to be pitied and might be helped.

"You didn't hear about the Exhibition of Lace that was opened to-day, Lady Coombes, I expect," Mrs. Dabbs assumed before she was seated. "It was quite a private affair, of course, all invitation, but you'd have been asked, of course, only for some mistake. The Dowager Lady Callowabbey"—Mrs. Dabbs used titles in full to make them go further—"regretted you weren't there."

"You surprise me," said Lady Coombes, with gentle irony.

"She did, I assure you," Mrs. Dabbs proceeded, taking Lady Coombes's surprise in good faith, as natural.

She entered into details. Titles were so thick in the company, it appeared, that not to have a title was the distinguished thing. And everybody was most affable. Her Royal Highness herself talked quite pleasantly to the young person who was holding the show, and the Duchess of Castlefield Saye remarked that there was a great deal to say about lace: "Her Royal Highness, it seems," Mrs. Dabbs overflowed, "can make lace herself, and she said she'd like to see every young lady making lace as once so many did. And I must say that for ladylike there's no work to compare to it. So good for the hands, too! I'm going to see about lessons for my girls. 'The devil finds some mischief still for idle hands to do,' you know, Lady Coombes."

"Why should I know specially, Mrs. Dabbs?" Lady Coombes asked, raising her eyebrows.

"Because there's few keep him out of employment like you do, with your clever hands, Lady Coombes," Mrs. Dabbs answered, equal to the emergency.

"Did Lady Callowabbey purchase much?" Lady Coombes glanced off, by way of saying something.

"No, but she fancied some," Mrs. Dabbs replied. "The Dowager Countess can't do much for herself just now, poor dear, with all her wealth. A mother's a mother whatever her rank, and sacrifice herself she will. And the young Earl!" She cast up her eyes. "Ducks and drakes *I* call it. But I said to her, 'Your ladyship mustn't lose heart. Wild oats have got to be sown. He'll settle down when he's married. Find him a nice, sensible girl with a bit of money.' But she said, 'My dear

lady,' she said, 'nice sensible girls with that requisite don't abound in the peerage,' she said, and I said, 'But they can be got in.' 'True,' she said. And then she sighed and said she'd like to find such a girl for the young Earl, if only she knew where to look, and wouldn't mind if one was found for him."

"You have daughters of your own," Lady Coombes suggested evenly.

Mrs. Filmer Dabbs's fund of good-nature rendered her impervious to irony without blinding her. Fair, fat, prosperous, and *franchement canaille,* to her inexhaustible self-satisfaction was added the protective sharpness which distinguishes the breed. The unexpected truth was her favourite bludgeon, and she whirled it now with effect.

"So I have, Lady Coombes," she answered blandly. "I'm a mother, Lady Coombes, and it wouldn't be me if I forgot it. The mother who doesn't do her best for her daughters isn't worth mentioning as a mother. If one of us mothers lands a daughter in the peerage, I'd say, 'Well done.' And I'd know what to think of the one who wouldn't say 'Well done,' to me. . . . Not but what there's better places than the peerage for many a wife. I should know! There's the Dowager Countess herself, poor thing. The way she hung over that bit of lace, as if she couldn't tear herself away without it, and envying me, too! 'You could buy up the whole Show, I suppose, my dear,' she said. . . . They have their trials in the peerage, I can tell you. But, however, she shall have her bit of lace; I'll see to that. It shan't be said of me that I don't stand by a friend, heart and hand. She's a noble woman, all for doing good. They all are, these great ladies, it's a lesson! They neither spare themselves, nor time nor trouble. She asked me to tell you the Lace Show is a good cause, and to get you to patronise it, and bring all your friends, and she'd like to make your acquaintance——"

"Oh, that is quite unnecessary," Lady Coombes hastily interrupted. "I am intelligent enough to examine a case myself, and I act on its merits."

"But I promised I would introduce you," Mrs. Dabbs remonstrated. "What am I to do?"

"Let the matter drop," said Lady Coombes. "Lady Callowabbey would have nothing in common with me, a middle-class woman, and I do not require to be whipped in to support a good cause by anybody. We should be at odds all the time, because

she would be inwardly feeling herself immensely my superior, and I should be inwardly ridiculing such pretension in a woman who felt herself stooping and yet stooped—to money! Besides, I have made my arrangements. The best authority on the subject is going to introduce me to Miss Ella Banks—Mr. Bosc."

"Oh, that man!" Mrs. Dabbs exclaimed, discomfited. She was jealous of Mr. Bosc on her husband's account, though she considered that Mr. Bosc was not in the same flight as Mr. Filmer Dabbs. And she was right. Mr. Bosc flew straight.

Mrs. Dabbs had announced to her family that morning at breakfast that she meant to be off to the Lace Show early. She wanted to catch the young person disengaged and have a good talk with her. And she wanted to get the Dowager Countess her bit of lace. "I always say give and you get again," she added, naïvely confessing her working principle. She had high example for the principle if not for the confession. Lady Callowabbey herself worked on it; it was implicit in the whole ordering of her life, though not displayed. Her mental attitude towards things in general differed in no essential particular from that of Mrs. Dabbs, only in Lady Callowabbey's case the expression of it had been refined by careful training combined with an innate sense of the value of reticence.

Mrs. Filmer, conveying her progeny, bore down upon Ella and opened fire without preliminaries.

"I just wanted to ask you," she began, her eyes wandering from one detail to another of Ella's perfect dress. "Didn't her Royal Highness say you'd give lessons in lace-making?"

"Lace-making is taught here," Ella answered. "I superintend."

"Oh, you don't do it yourself? But my daughters will take lessons, and they're used to the best of everything. I should want you to come to the house."

"I am sorry," said Ella. "That is impossible. This is a school, and the pupils must attend it. My teachers are excellent."

A young girl, simply dressed, with a maid in attendance, came up and shook hands with her, smiling and diffident. "Here I am, Ella," she said. "Are you ready for me? I'm so nervous!"

Ella laughed. "Nervous pupils treated with tenderness to keep their hands cool," she replied, then they both laughed. "Miss Hildenborough," Ella said, "take Lady Ann into the

schoolroom. . . . Excuse me," she apologised to Mrs. Filmer Dabbs.

"Lady Ann *who*?" Mrs. Filmer asked, following, with dilated eyes, the young lady whom Miss Hildenborough was piloting up the steps of the daïs, until she disappeared through the folding-doors into the room beyond.

"Lady Ann Brabant," Ella answered indifferently.

"Brabant," Mrs. Filmer repeated. "That's Castlefield Saye, isn't it? The Duchess that set you up? The Duchess lets Lady Ann Brabant take lessons *here*?"

Ella answered each of these questions with a slight inclination of her head.

"Mildred," said Mrs. Filmer, impressively. "You must set to work at once." Then, addressing Ella condescendingly, she explained. "I'd not let my daughters come to everybody, you know, but a *prodegee* of the Duchess is different."

Ella's gravity survived *"prodegee."*

"Where did she pick you up?" Mrs. Filmer proceeded. Ella's fine eyebrows quivered inquiringly. "I mean where did she come across you?"

"Of whom are you speaking?" Ella asked.

"The Duchess, of course. Who did you suppose? I'm asking you where the Duchess came across you?"

"My home is on the Pointz estate," Ella answered, "by Castlefield Saye."

"And what's your people?"

"My father is a tenant farmer."

"In a large way, I suppose?"

"In quite a small way."

"Well, you don't look it, and you don't speak like it. That's the Duchess, of course. She must have spent a lot of money on you. You come in contact with her, too, I dare say, and that's refined you. Now, is she free with you? Or does she keep you in your place? How do you speak to her?"

"I have only one way of speaking," Ella answered.

"You don't mean to tell me that you speak to a Duchess as you would to a common nobody!" Mrs. Filmer exclaimed.

Ella was silent, but Mrs. Filmer was not to be quenched.

"You say 'your Grace' every time, and walk backwards," she insisted.

Ella's outward gravity deepened. Inwardly she was beginning to enjoy this preposterous woman. Not so Miss Hilden-

borough. Miss Hildenborough only saw in Mrs. Filmer Dabbs, "The sort you have to put up with sometimes even in a high-class business."

"I *should* know," Mrs. Filmer pursued. "I've met the Duchess myself. I'm not saying that I'm a friend of hers. What do her friends call her?"

Mrs. Filmer had no false pride. She often said she wasn't going to lose her way for want of asking.

"Duchess," Ella answered.

"They don't say 'your Grace' every time?"

"They don't say 'your Grace' at all."

"And her children, what do they call her?"

"They speak to her as other children speak to their mothers, and of her, when they mention her to me——"

The Show had been empty when the Filmer Dabbs arrived, but by this time many more ladies had come in, and some now joined the group, anxious to hear what Ella was saying. During the long hours of these arduous days, Ella was on her feet constantly answering questions, delivering incessant lectures on lace.

Mrs. Filmer, becoming aware of an audience, saw an opportunity to be exploited for her own honour and glory, and interrupted: "Oh, they do speak to you then, the children of her Grace the Duchess," she was beginning—

But Ella's sensitive mouth expressed impatience, and Miss Hildenborough had a bad moment. "If she loses her temper now she'll boggle it," she thought fearfully. She never showed her own, whatever the provocation, when doing a deal depended upon keeping it. But Ella controlled herself, and merely interrupted in turn with:

"Can I have the pleasure of showing you some of my lace?"

"That reminds me," said Mrs. Filmer. "You know that bit of lace the Dowager Countess of Callowabbey fancied, the aristocratic old lady that came with me the other day when the Princess invited us privately to the opening of your Exhibition in a wig?"

"I remember," Ella said. "It was a specimen of *vraie Valenciennes.*"

"Well, I'm going to make her ladyship a present of it, cost what it may."

"I am sorry," said Ella. "It is not for sale. It was only lent for the Exhibition by"—she looked about her—"oh, here it

is!" She read the label—"'Lent by the Lady Janet Brastaby.'"

Mrs. Filmer's countenance dropped at this unexpected check. "I'll have it copied then," she said resolutely.

"It could be copied if Lady Janet had no objection," Ella said doubtfully.

"Must you ask her?"

"Certainly I must. But I must warn you. I can make you a piece of real lace of this pattern, but it would not be *vraie Valenciennes*. *Vraie Valenciennes* can only be made in the city itself. Monsieur Dieudonné says it is so inherent in the place, that it is an established fact, if a piece of lace were begun at Valenciennes and finished outside the walls, the part which had not been made at Valenciennes would be visibly less beautiful and less perfect than the other, though continued by the same lacemaker with the same thread and upon the same pillow."

"My!" This significant ejaculation escaped from Miss Dabbs.

The group was now the centre of an interested crowd, all eagerly intent upon the colloquy. Mrs. Dabbs pretended to ignore the fact, but felt "as good as her Royal Highness," and raised her voice in imitation of that lady, when next she spoke. "What does it cost?" she asked casually, as if the price were a mere detail which did not really matter to her.

"Almost anything," Ella answered. "It depends upon the pattern, the thread used, and the width required. The labour of making it is very great, and it is slow work. From two to three hundred bobbins are required for a piece this width. In the Exhibition of 1867, one pillow exhibited with lace in progress had twelve hundred bobbins. In the International Exhibition of 1874 there were no less than eight thousand bobbins on a Courtrai pillow used for making a parasol cover. The lacemaker, working twelve hours a day, can scarcely produce one-third of an inch a week, and for this labour her daily earnings do not amount to a living wage."

Ella's tone and the wild-rose tint which suddenly glowed through the transparent pallor of her cheeks, conveyed her indignant sense of this iniquity.

"Oh, what a burning shame!" Muriel Dabbs exclaimed, pleading with her pathetic eyes, to one and another for sympathy, but the only eyes which answered hers with comprehension were Ella's own. The understanding glance that passed between the two girls warmed the heart of each to the other.

"Valenciennes like this used to be made in underground cel-

lars by young girls, as a rule, working from four in the morning till eight at night," Ella pursued. "Many were almost blind before they were thirty. Very seldom was a piece finished by one worker; when it was, the value was enormously increased. And, only think of it, these poor girls scarcely made tenpence a day. Nowadays, too——"

"What about the thread?" Mrs. Filmer interrupted, impatient of this allusion to starving workgirls, which she thought in the worst possible taste. "I don't think much of the colour of this!"—alluding to the exhibit. "Keeping's not improved it, I should say."

"That reddish tint is peculiar to the *vraie Valenciennes*, it was never a clear white. Thread is improved by age. The kind used is all-important. The flax is cultivated for the purpose. The finest linen-thread is spun in the dark in underground rooms. Contact with the air causes the thread to break. It is so fine, you can hardly see it. The feel of the thread is the surest guide. The thread-spinner closely examines every inch drawn from her distaff, and when any irregularity occurs stops her wheel to repair the mischief. A background of dark paper is used to throw out the thread, and the room is so arranged as to admit a single ray of light upon the work. The life of a thread-spinner is unhealthy——"

But Mrs. Filmer was not going to be bothered with the life of a spinner.

"Of course," she burst in. "Spun in the dark! That was what the Princess was alluding to the other day. I didn't ask, not to interrupt, and meaning to come again as she invited us, when an opportunity would be sure to offer. There's a time for everything, and I always say wait for your opportunity. Well, now, as to the thread. I believe in having the best of everything. I always say it pays best in the end, so give me the best thread. What do you recommend?"

"Oh, of course, I recommend the best," Ella answered pleasantly. "The price per pound is about seven hundred guineas."

Mrs. Filmer changed countenance. "Do you mean to tell *me* that you pay seven hundred guineas for one pound of thread?" she demanded incredulously.

"For the best. The colour does not change and it wears forever."

There was a perceptible pause, then Mrs. Filmer spoke rather hurriedly: "Well, we must see about it. I always say more

haste less speed. Perhaps Lady Janet Brastaby might think it would make her lace common having it copied?"

"Oh, not for you surely!" Ella answered evenly, but not evenly enough to deceive certain of the ladies who were looking on. Whispers were exchanged: "The Winged Victory has had enough of Mrs. D.!" "And doesn't mind showing it!" "Oh, Mrs. D. is impervious." "She's in retreat anyway."

Miss Hildenborough, overhearing, smiled discreetly, and lowered her mild ox-eyes; an unnecessary precaution for they were always expressionless, though wide-open enough in every sense of the word—valuable eyes to a girl in business in London, where self-protection depends greatly on the power to see without seeming to see.

"Mrs. D." was in retreat, but she covered the fact valiantly by diverting attention to lace-pillows. The young ladies must have lace-pillows, the best, of course—"just like that one yonder, the Duchess said was lent by the Duke's grandmother. Satin the same colour and quality, and the bobbins ivory and gold."

Ella objected this time on her own account, though she could not have explained why. "That pillow cannot be copied," she said positively.

Mrs. Filmer "gave her a look." "Well, I never did!" she exclaimed, and would have followed up the "look" with a "piece of her mind," for that sort of person must be kept in her place—and the way she spoke! quite forgetting who she was speaking to——

But Miss Hildenborough opportunely intervened and saved the situation. Her business instincts were shocked. If Miss Banks played fast and loose with wealthy customers like this, where would they all be? This sort of lady can always be managed if you go the right way about it.

"You could have *your* bobbins inlaid with precious stones, muddem," she suggested with an ingratiating smile. "That would be very sweet and quite unique. We intend to have designs ready against her Royal Highness comes again."

"You can send the designs to me then, and an estimate for the whole cost, lace and thread—the best—included." Mrs. Filmer spoke for effect, then proudly sailed away, without waiting to be asked her address.

This was one of numerous episodes, all instructive, some pleasant, some humorous, and an occasional one about which all that the Argus-Eyed could say out of business hours, when

she and Miss Hildenborough were given to discussing the events of the day, was that our Miss Banks had something to put up with, my word! and if she expected a bed of roses in the lace trade, she'd find her mistake. To which Miss Hildenborough sadly assented, but loyally maintained that our Miss Banks could hold her own with any of 'em, only if anything too independent, and not to be advised, though she'd ask you and listen to what you had to say pleasantly enough; but go her own way, she would, say all you could think. Hear her to Mr. Bosc the other day, about the candles! No, have them in the showroom she was determined, and move her he couldn't.

"Well, she did say 'just by way of experiment,'" the Argus-Eyed in fairness reminded Miss Hildenborough. "She's reasonable. And I'd let her experiment. All the telling in the world doesn't teach a child what to dread like letting it burn its fingers once in a way. But she'd best be advised by Mr. Bosc. I know what it'll be with all those idle, club-loafing, fine gents about. *I* know 'em! I had my hands full, I can tell you, where I was last, head-woman in a fancy business. Not dangerous as a rule but a nuisance, that's what I found 'em."

"It's not so much the reel gents," said Miss Hildenborough, with her ox-eyes on past experiences. "It's the would-be's. Reel gents don't need twice telling if you mean it. And they'll not look at a common workgirl."

"No, but they're always on the lookout for the uncommon, especially the old brutes. They're nasty." The Argus-Eyed made a grimace, as at a bad smell or taste. "And our Miss Banks is uncommon. She'll hold her own, but she'll make mistakes, and pay dear for them. What them swells want is driving with a whip. Hard work and plain food makes a clean sweep of the devil in man, and lets in the light, too, to show him the way to heaven. It's a pity our Miss Banks hasn't our faith and its forms to help her. There are those that laughs at forms, but form is better than nothing. It works into the mind and stores it with warnings which come out when need is. If ever I come near to doing what I shouldn't do myself, there's always a voice in me keeps saying, 'Thou God seest me,' and that's enough. If you stick to the form, the spirit is never far off, and when the day of troubles comes and all other helpers fail, and you're driven to call for help, you'll know how and be helped."

Miss Hildenborough took this for a warning. "I do my best,"

she said humbly. "I go to my duty every week, and keep the fasts. And I pray for us all. 'Mary pity women!'"

"'Mary pity women!'" the Argus-Eyed echoed with a sigh.

Ella owed these two admirable assistants to Mrs. Bosc, who had chosen them of the "'old faith,' because," she insisted, "a woman who goes to her duty regularly is to be trusted to do her duty."

CHAPTER IX

"SO FAR, SO GOOD," THINKS ELLA

1

It was the end of May, but so chilly in the evening that Ella had ordered a fire to be lighted in her sitting-room. Work for the day was done, her girls and her domestics had retired to their own quarters, Miss Hildenborough and the Argus-Eyed had taken their latchkeys and gone to the theatre, and Ella sat alone, looking thoughtfully into the fire.

Ten days had flown since the opening of her Exhibition, and during that time Rumour had been working hard for her. The distinction of her appearance and manner had to be accounted for. The simple truth, which had been distinctly stated, that she was the daughter of a tenant farmer in a small way on an estate adjoining one of the properties of the Duke of Castlefield Saye, was not spicy enough to satisfy the gossips. Look at her! That high head of hers and her step showed pedigree. Daughters of common farmers may be beautiful, but they don't have that air! Who was she? An American millionairess masquerading as a workgirl to gain experience, with the connivance of "Good Gracious,"—otherwise the Duchess of Castlefield Saye,—and the Princess Anna—this was the most widely accepted solution of the problem, to begin with. It accounted for her not having been seen in London before, and Americans do sometimes speak with an English accent.

Not a word of this gossip reached Ella's ears, but Adaptable Bosc knew, of course. He had been approached on the subject by the desperately curious, who hoped to break down the impregnable guard of his professional discretion by importunity or guile. Mr. Bosc, as a conscientious business man, had to contradict these reports in the way of business, but he did not object

"Comfort, this," he said, spreading his hands out to the blaze. "Chilly all day, and now—listen! That's wind. Going to be a wild night. God help our men at sea!"

Ella, with a nervous shiver, raised her head to listen. "How suddenly the wind has risen!" she said. "A wild night. The sort of night that always makes me feel as if I had done something wrong."

He pondered this saying awhile, with his eyes on the fire; then shook off the impression, whatever it was, and turned to look at the room, in search of a change of subject.

"So here you are," he began cheerily. "My poor sister's room. My favourite sister. Don't you wonder how I got in to-night?"

"Now you mention it, yes," she said.

He showed her a latchkey. "We were the best of friends, she and I. Poor Alicia! I wish you'd known her! She gave me this"—tapping his hand with the latchkey. "I keep it as a souvenir. Key to her affections as well as to her hall door. Gift of the heart. Her wish that I should use it always. When the house was hers. Always at home here."

"I hope you always will use it," Ella said earnestly.

"Thank you." He smiled. "Comes in useful again then. You make me at home, too?"

"Respectfully, if your Grace so pleases."

"Respectfully, eh?" He looked at her enquiringly, but waited in vain. She could have given him the word he wanted, with her whole heart, for he was the dearest man in the world to her in all honest affection, but something held her tongue-tied. She could not pronounce it.

"Eh, well!" he sighed, and looked round the room. "Still like Alicia," he observed. "Also like you. Interesting. What I expected too. Books, work, space, freshness; no lumber, no fallals, yet feminine. Walls rather bare, though. Alicia preferred them bare. Not my taste, bare walls. Wouldn't you like some pictures?"

Ella hesitated. "Ought I to indulge in anything I like which is not absolutely necessary?" she asked.

"Everything you like is absolutely necessary, my dear," he answered, without looking at her. "Didn't Bosc make you understand that you have *carte blanche*?"

"Yes. And I have taken large advantage in every respect which I thought necessary for the success of my undertaking. But Mr. Bosc did not make me understand why I should have

carte blanche for anything not necessary. He evaded the subject, and I want to know. I have been longing to ask you. You will tell me?" She looked at him with her charming smile, persuasively. "And there is another point which Mr. Bosc will not discuss, yet it is all-important. The *quid pro quo*. How is the Duchess to be repaid? I cannot bear to be in debt."

The Duke ran his eye over the carving on the chimney-piece, but if he thought to escape an explanation by ignoring the question, he was mistaken. Ella persisted.

"When I wrote to thank the Duchess for her munificence," she said, "I ventured to point out respectfully that there were no bounds to the gratitude I had to offer her in repayment of her goodness, but that for the rest——"

The Duke stopped her impatiently. "Yes, yes, I know," he said. "But you must not trouble the Duchess with details. This is not a monetary investment, don't you see? This is an investment on a higher plane. The success of your enterprise, that is the important thing. Through you the Duchess is encouraging industry. She is finding work for clever hands to do; providing a comfortable livelihood for women-workers, who, without her help—through you—would have been left to starve on a pittance. Also, by the way, she is fostering a beautiful art. To do all this is high remuneration for—for anybody. Don't you see?"

"I see so far as the necessaries are concerned," she still persisted. "It is the unnecessaries that I——"

Again he stopped her, ducally now, impatient of contradiction, but gently at the same time, in deference to her womanhood.

"There are no unnecessaries," he said. "Everything that helps to keep up the efficiency of the moving spirit is necessary. The mind must be fed, the imagination stimulated to activity. Books, you know, pictures, music, the drama. There should be friendly intercourse between the arts; they profit each other. Luxury is enervating, hardship is destructive; ease is the happy medium. To save wear and tear. A refined young woman requires the refinements of life, to keep her up to her full strength. There is true economy in everything that makes for power and for the conservation of energy. Now, do you see?"

"I see," she said humbly. "Still, I am ashamed of myself. A simple workgirl, born and bred to work, ought not to require——"

"Ah! there you are!" he broke in, satisfied. "You do find

your efficiency doubled already, now confess! I've caught you out!"

Her little disconcerted laugh confessed it.

"How wonderful that the Duchess should know," she said. "How comes she to know, who never felt a want?"

"Oh, sympathetic insight," he replied, and dismissed the subject offhand.

They were silent for a little, then he asked: "What are you thinking of now?"

"Hollyhocks," she answered laconically. "And that pin you wear sometimes, the fox's head with ruby eyes. You wore it the day you came to see me first, at Red Rose Farm."

He was silent so long that she turned to look at him inquiringly. He roused himself. "Hollyhocks and a tiepin, a queer mixture," he said. "How do you account for it? There were no hollyhocks at Red Rose Farm."

"The hollyhocks grew in the little garden in front of my grandmother's cottage," she answered. "When I think of them, I think of your tiepin. I cannot account for it, yet there must be some connection."

Again she looked at him inquiringly. He stooped to pick up the poker, and stirred the fire.

"So the great day has come and gone," he said, "your opening day, eh?"

"My opening day," she repeated, yielding perforce to this abrupt change of subject. "My coming out."

"Do you care——" he began, then hesitated. "Are you interested in that sort of thing—young ladies coming out, you know? Does it attract you? Having to make your curtsey to Royalty, I mean."

She thought this over, her eyes on the fire. "I wonder," she said at last. "But I *have* made my curtsey to Royalty!" she added.

"Princess Anna, eh?" he answered. "Nice woman. Reliable. Talkative, very. Nice to you, eh?"

Ella smiled. "I do hope she will come again," she said.

"She will," he answered.

There was a long silence. Each would have given a good deal to know the other's thoughts. He was surveying the limits imposed on the individual by the tyranny of convention, she was questioning the future, not unhopefully.

Finally the Duke rose, and stood with his back to the fire,

looking down at her. "Bosc all right, I hope?" he asked. "Attentive, eh?"

"Invaluable," she replied. "And Mrs. Bosc, too."

"Oh, Mrs. Bosc! Mrs. Bosc is a dear!"

"You know her then?"

"Well. I made their acquaintance—traced him to his lair one day. I like to inquire into things. Rather expected to find his lair was an armchair in an out-of-date sort of club. So I called, and found Mrs. Bosc. Everything there unexpected, Mrs. Bosc most of all. Queer fellow Bosc—Affable Bosc. Affability inherited. French extraction, you know. So Mrs. Bosc has befriended you? Takes you about? That's right. You can go about with *her*."

The emphasis indicated that she was not to go about with anybody else. Ella understood and inwardly consented without questioning his right to dictate.

"Go with her to anything you want to see," he proceeded. "All the sights. And the Opera. .Her house too. Nice place to spend your Sunday afternoons. Other houses—h'm. You're certain to be asked." He looked at her sharply.

"I shall go to no other houses," she said decidedly.

He looked relieved. "So they've been a help?" he asked again.

And again she answered: "Invaluable! Mrs. Bosc, Mr. Bosc, and Mr. Bosc's carriage, make everything easy for me."

"Mr. Bosc's carriage!" the Duke exclaimed. "Didn't know he had a carriage. Why don't you use your own?"

"My own?" she asked in puzzled surprise.

"Yes. Yours." He spoke sharply. "Didn't it meet you at the station when you arrived? I told Bosc."

"A carriage met me," she faltered. "I thought it was Mr. Bosc's."

"No, my dear, it's your own," he said. "A little present from me. Just to keep you going. You must let me have a finger in the pie. The Duchess—the Duchess always trusts to my judgment in the matter of carriages and horses. That's my department . . . just to keep you going, you know," he repeated, pleased with the little play upon words. "Goodnight. I shall look you up again. Soon."

He was gone before she could frame a coherent phrase.

She sank into a chair and clasped her hands to her breast. "He knows! He knows!" she cried aloud. "And he does not disapprove!"

He knew of his son's infatuation and did not disapprove—she jumped to that conclusion. The Duke on her side, what had she to fear from the Duchess? She could hold her own against the Duchess of Castlefield Saye or any other mother-in-law. And Marchioness of Melton she would be, else beauty had lost its power and will was no determining factor in the lives of mankind—but not for vulgar pride of position, no! Her peasant blood in revolt, brought to the boil by the suffering and injustice she had witnessed, clamoured for retribution. Ella Banks aspired to rank and wealth only in order to have it in her power *"to make them pay"*—that greedy, selfish crew who withheld from the labouring classes all that made life worth living.

BOOK II

The intellectual power, through words and things,
Went sounding on, a dim and perilous way.

WORDSWORTH: THE EXCURSION.

CHAPTER I

ELLA SEES SOMETHING OF MEN AND MANNERS

1

Lord Terry de Beach, curious as any, hastened to have a look at the Lace Girl. Ella's first few weeks at shopkeeping in London had been crowded with minor experiences, letters of the alphabet of life, by means of which she was slowly learning to spell out some useful and interesting scraps of knowledge of the world. When Lord Terry arrived, accompanied by Mr. Harkles, he found her fresh from a tussle with London smuts and in the midst of an encounter with little Lord Callowabbey, who had come to see her under the delusion that his way with chorus girls and barmaids would be the right way to fascinate her. It was one afternoon between four and five o'clock, when she was alone in the showroom, her staff having gone to their tea, and clients, for the same reason, were few. The weather was sultry; but if the windows were open her lace was endangered by showers of smuts, if they were shut she suffered for want of air. Beveridge must see to it at once that the windows were covered with fine black gauze, and in the meantime she would watch the smuts. Feather brush in hand, she was moving briskly about the room, when she became aware of a youth approaching her jauntily, his hands in his pockets, his hat on the back of his head. He accosted her as he came up.

"Jolly Show, I call it," he said. "Awfully jolly Show, I call it," he repeated, stopping in front of her and balancing himself on his heels and toes.

Ella, dropping the brush, involuntarily drew herself up and stepped back, staring at his hat.

Flushing, he found himself unable to keep up the jaunty-familiar strain. His first impulse was to defend himself: "Does one take one's hat off in Exhibitions?" he began, drawling superciliously, but the next moment he had taken it off, and

was muttering sheepishly: "My mistake," his eyes on something behind her.

Ella, turning to see what there was to account for this sudden change of mind, found herself face to face with Mr. Harkles and Lord Terry de Beach, both hat in hand, Lord Terry an astonishing figure to her as he stood, lean-shanked, pot-bellied, bald as a bonze, goggling at her with big, prominent, fishy grey eyes.

Remembering the dangling stay-lace, she greeted Mr. Harkles with the smile he mistook for a flattering distinction.

"Callowabbey—Jacky, eh? How d'ye do?" Lord Terry saluted the young man offhand.

"The young Earl," Mr. Harkles simpered, casting up his eyes. Callowabbey groaned. His indiscreet mother was to blame. A notorious mimic, she was indifferent to consequences when she found a good subject, and lately she had been making capital for laughter out of Mrs. Filmer Dabbs. Thus "the young Earl" had got abroad, and was being used by his associates for all it was worth as a means of torment.

"Jacky among the connoisseurs?" Lord Terry asked with a meaningful goggle, which was lost upon Callowabbey, though not upon Ella, as the sudden enhancement of her beauty by the exquisite wild-rose tint that appeared on her cheeks betrayed to the observant eye of Mr. Harkles. Further, a haughty movement of her head showed him it displeased her to be classed in a category with goods to be appraised, and he spoke to effect a diversion.

"I thought this would be a good time, er——" he said. "It is no use coming with the crowd, one sees nothing."

"I'll bet you came with the crowd all the same," Jacky struck in. "Princesses, Duchesses—all that sort of thing, don't you know; that's where you'll find Mr. Julius Harkles," he told Ella.

"Horses, singers, dancers—all that sort of thing; that's where you'll find Lord Callowabbey," Mr. Harkles hit back genially.

"Haw! What do you think of that for cricket?" Jacky wanted to know, shooting out his shirt-cuff at Ella.

"Well hit," came the inevitable rejoinder with a smile.

"By Jove!" Lord Terry applauded. "A wit as well as a beauty."

"I warned you," said Mr. Harkles.

It seemed to Ella that a reputation for wit was easily earned in their *galère.*

"Is there anything you would particularly like to see?" she asked politely.

Jacky chuckled. Here were the two old hands both at fault and both wiped out at once. But not discouraged. Mr. Harkles just shifted his ground.

"If I might, I should like to see——" he began. "But I shall be wasting your valuable time. I am not a purchaser. A connoisseur of my means can only afford to feast his eyes. The second best has no charm for him, and the best is beyond reach of his purse. He can only be of use in the way of er—well, he can be a guide-post, you know, to show purchasers the way."

"Modest man!" Jacky exclaimed. "He's trying to tell you without saying it, that he'll be a walking advertisement for your Show. It's the truth too. I give you my word!"

"The word of 'the young Earl,'" Mr. Harkles desired Lord Terry de Beach to note.

"Oh, *Thou* hast caused me this anguish, my mother! Blow 'the young Earl'! I give you my word it's true," Callowabbey persisted. "When Mr. Julius Harkles (Old Point de Raccroc)"—he gave Julius this poke in parenthesis—"is out to advertise, sandwich-men are not in it with him. When Harkles is out to advertise he does it, I give you my word."

"Isis unveiled!" Lord Terry de Beach applauded.

"Mr. Harkles is an ally to be courted," Ella said patiently.

The corncrake voice of Lord Terry de Beach was again uplifted: "Good wine needs no bush, my dea—Miss, er——"

"*Mademoiselle La Victoire aux Ailes,*" Callowabbey helped him out, and, spinning round on his heel for joy of the sally, threw up his hat and caught it.

Ella, not having a clue to this *badinage,* looked from one to the other, at a loss. What she gathered was that they had not come for any purpose that she could countenance. "I am much obliged to you," she said, head held high and colour flickering. "My time *is* precious, and the light is still good. I will send my best-informed woman to take you round. Good-evening, gentlemen, and thank you."

She left them staring, walked the length of the room with easy, buoyant, unhurried gait, mounted the steps of the daïs "more on wings than on feet," and disappeared through the folding-doors.

They turned to each other simultaneously, and put on their hats.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" Thus Callowabbey voiced his feelings. "What d'ye make of *that*?"

"I'm jiggered too," said Mr. Harkles.

Lord Terry, on the contrary, was favourably impressed: "She has dignity, that girl," was his comment at the time. "I like her spirit!"

2

Because of the fiasco of the faded flower Col Drindon stayed away from the Corner House for a time. He meant to return. The longing to see Ella again was an ache, the hope a delight; but he felt that it would be a mistake to show himself with empty hands. Until he had found an offering which should be an acceptable emollient, he dared not venture. The possibility of her having thought no more either of him or his faded flower never occurred to him. His self-conceit did not flatter him so far as to make him imagine that she thought kindly of him, but that she should not think of him at all when he was thinking of nothing but her, was inconceivable. To be thought of with resentment is better than nothing; resentment is a strong feeling, and any feeling, if strong, may be diverted to new purpose. Tepid indifference is hopeless; but baneful hate may be changed to burning love.

But the difficulty was what to offer—not flowers, of course, because of the unfortunate association. And his poet's sensibility revolted from offering the kind of thing that young men offer to mercenary ladies. His winged idol was pure of clay, her feet were golden lilies. Besides he knew better. The poet, Joyday Flowers, was a dreamer; but the Honourable Colin Drindon, of good birth, means and position, was a man of the world. And young as he was he had reason to trust to his *flair* when it came to gauging the merits of a woman. He had one of those temperaments which leave much to be desired when not under strict control. His double attributes were not calculated to work together harmoniously. The conservatism and prejudices of his caste, innate in him, were apt to interfere with the full enjoyment of his poet's license as such license was understood in the school to which he belonged, and the disturbance, though it might not tell on his conduct, invariably

spoilt his pleasure; and until one side or the other of his dual nature obtained the mastery—the side that was for making a high-minded gentleman of him as against the side that threatened to make him a besotted sensualist—there could be no peace in him and no counting upon him.

The next time Ella saw him was during that quiet hour in the afternoon when she was on duty alone in the showroom, a time she liked for the freedom it gave her to reflect. She was wont to retire into herself during that breathing-space, and to emerge from it with her mind made up about matters on which she had felt doubtful during the busy hours of the day, when she seldom had a moment to think things out.

She was sitting in the deep curtained recess which formed the projecting angle of the house, whence, from the three windows, she could look out in all directions. But she was not looking out. She had just closed her writing-bureau and put her work away, and was thoughtfully viewing her domain, when the young man entered the showroom. He stood looking about him. As he did not see Ella at first, she had time to see him well. She had been too excited on the opening day of her Show to notice him particularly when he spoke to her, and she had no recollection of him now. But now as then, she liked the look of him.

There was nothing of the romantic poet in his appearance, as romantic poets are popularly depicted. His face was rather puffy, and he looked altogether too full-fed for high thinking. Self-indulgence was encouraging his too, too solid flesh, and it would have taken some melting to reduce him to the esthetic ideal pictured by many of his readers as Joyday Flowers. All the same, he was a good-looking young man, tall and broad and strong; fair, square-chinned, with a sensitive red-lipped mouth, white teeth, and heavy-lidded light blue eyes; clean-shaven, but with abundance of brightly burnished fair hair curling back from a high, broad forehead.

He had been Col Drindon in his dress at the opening of the Show. Col Drindon turned out correctly for the occasion. He was credited at the Land and Leisure Club with *savoir faire*, only they did not call it *savoir faire*. They said, "Seedy knows wot's wot." It had occurred to one bright wit that C. D. sounded Seedy, and he had been called Seedy by his intimates from that day forth, in moments of tender affection.

To-day he was Joyday Flowers. His long narrow feet were

lightly shod in patent-leather pointed-toed shoes tied with ribbons. The peculiar blue of his tie matched the colour of his eyes, and harmonised with the greyness of his suit and the fairness of his complexion. But for this harmony of colour he might have been supposed to be indifferent to dress, so carelessly were his things put on; but becoming harmonies of colour are not produced without design and choice, and design and choice indicate thought and care; therefore the suggested indifference was obviously a studied effect.

Standing in the doorway, his pose was graceful and diffident, as if he were hesitating to advance. In his left hand he held his hat, his gloves, and a swagger stick. With his right he fidgeted, now smoothing his hair, now grasping the lapel of his coat, now resting hand on hip, in evident uncertainty of mind. Finally he decided to come forward, and seeing Ella, who had advanced into the room, he made for her direct. Usually she met her customers with undisturbed gravity, but she had a smile for this young man, a smile of amusement. It was involuntary—or what we call involuntary in our ignorance of the subtle influences which move us to swift conclusions, and mould our decisions by means more rapid than thought and more reliable.

Col had come with a poem in his pocket, which was to be his peace-offering; but he had not come with a prepared plan of campaign. He was relying upon inspiration for an opening, and wisely. Plans formed in advance are apt to be abortive, because there is no foreseeing what moves the other party to the game may make. Ella's smile gave Col his inspiration. It invited him to be himself.

"You want to look at my lace?" she asked.

"No," he answered. "I want to look at you."

"That is candid at all events," she said. Her inclination was to laugh—not at him, but because he pleased her. There was no offence in his bluntness; it was boyish, not impertinent.

"Nothing if not candid," he rejoined, then broke off. "I *say!*" he exclaimed, swinging his hat round to indicate the inexpressible. "I *say!* That was lovely of you the other day! Jacky, of course, and the old Terrier! But why Mr. Harkles? Not that that detracts from the loveliness. But why?"

Ella looked puzzled. "I do not understand," she said.

"That trio you had here the other day, Callowabbey, and——"

"You mean the young man who speaks funny French, the little dark thing——"

"Oh, stop, stop!" he cried. "You can't improve upon that! That is *It*—exactly. And the old Terrier—Lord Terry de Beach?"

"The old unvenerable man——"

"Corrupter of youth," Col followed on, and exploded with laughter. "Had you ever seen anything like him before?"

"Yes, in *Punch*," she answered, betrayed by his infectious levity.

"And Mr. Harkles—what do you think of Mr. Harkles?"

The waggling staylace recurred to her mind's eye, as always when Mr. Harkles was in question, but she allowed for human weaknesses, and answered not unkindly: "He seemed a pleasant old gentleman, with no harm in him."

The young man threw himself on to a seat, tossed up his hat, stick and gloves, kicked out his legs and waved his arms, in an ecstasy of mirth. Ella stared at him half amused, half wishing he wouldn't.

"Excuse these antics," he said, when he had recovered himself. "I am a poet. But there are feelings which can only be physically expressed. *Would* you mind—oh, please, *please* do not mind! Tell me, *do* tell me! What do you think of me?"

"Oh, you are not to be taken seriously."

He gathered himself together, stood up, and came out of his antic-fit chagrined. "Indeed!" His powers of expression were bounded for the moment by this exclamation, but his discomposure showed in his face. Gleaning his scattered gloves, stick, and hat, from the floor, he arranged them carefully in his left hand, as if much depended on the way he held them. "Somehow, I don't like it," he protested at last.

"You want to be taken seriously?" She seemed surprised.

"Well, yes." He spoke huffily. "Don't you?"

"I am not to be taken otherwise."

"Oh, then you have one defect!" he exclaimed. "The gods relax. And the goddesses have their moments of mirth."

"I quite believe it," she said. "They must laugh when the gods relax in the manner you suggest."

"I am not obtuse," he answered plaintively. "But I do hope you are not modern." He shook his head. "In the good old days no goddess ever laughed at the gods."

"So it got about that women have no sense of humour," she said, and won back his smiles.

"I am glad I came," he was beginning again——

"Which reminds me," she interrupted. "Why did you come?"

"I told you," he replied, forgetting the poem in his pocket. "I came to look at you."

"Surely, an impertinence."

"No, excuse me."

"What excuse have you?"

They looked into each other's faces.

"I'll try to explain," Col said at last. "You are a poet's dream materialised, and I am a poet. I look at you with a poet's eyes, with a poet's heart, with a poet's perception of the divine in the beautiful, and my spirit is uplifted. I wish I could make you understand! I know I play the fool, but that is playing a part——"

He paused on the suggestion, and Ella walked away from him the whole length of the room, slowly, and slowly returned to him.

"Do you know," she said, "I believe I should really like the real you if you let it appear—if you did not pose. There is a side of you, I am sure, that can be taken seriously."

He poked the floor with his stick, looked at her, looked at his stick, and looked at her again. He had made up his mind. "All right," he said briskly. "I give it to you baldly. I am not rotten at the core."

She held out her hand to him. "Friends, then," she said.

He grasped her hand, and, looking down into her face wistfully, echoed the word, "Friends! Yes, I am your friend for ever—*my beautiful.* Your poet. Your knight defender should ever need be—which the dear Lord forfend!"

A shrill voice called from behind, "Colin!"

Startled, they fell apart, and Ella, turning, saw a young lady with an angry face coming at them as if she meant to fall upon them tooth and nail.

"Lady Ballard and Sarb," Col drawled, coolly presenting the lady to Ella.

Each looked the other over offensively, neither accepting the introduction. Ella saw a handsome brunette, dressed so as to display her every womanly charm. Lady B. and S., blind with jealousy, saw nothing.

"Well!" she gasped, addressing Colin, "I thought I should find you here."

"Yes, here I am," he answered gaily. "For the second time in my life. Fodder for poesy here." He glanced round. "Fodder for a poet to batten upon. Clover."

He looked from one to the other comically. He had aimed at mollifying Lady B. and S. by letting her know that this was only his second visit, but in his annoyance, he could not control the impulse to sting her at the same time.

She rose to the occasion. "Clover?" she said, as cool and as smiling now as he was. "It is said to be death to sheep."

"I may mention that a poet is not a sheep," he replied.

"Oh, my poor little fact!" she exclaimed. "How unkind to distort it!"

Col addressed Ella. "Lady Ballard and Sarb is an amateur of all the arts," he said.

"Would Lady Ballard and Sarb like to see my lace?" Ella asked indifferently.

"Not to-day," Lady B. and S. spoke sharply and turned her back. "Are you coming, Col?" She looked at him over her shoulder, and waited to make sure of him. She would have waited till the three of them had crumbled into dust rather than leave him there alone with Ella, and he knew it. There was nothing for it but to go. Seeing him make a move, Lady B. and S. led the way to the door. Beaten and shamed, with eyes cast down, he bowed to Ella, and followed his enslaver, giving in and going quietly lest worse should come of it, as a dog, put on the lead and hating it, gives in, cowed by a threat of the whip.

The incident made a most unpleasant impression on Ella, and puzzled her too. At the time, she had no clue whatever to the meaning of it. She had never read a novel in which the "Smart Set" and its ways figured, had never even heard that there was a "Smart Set"; and her experiences of life in a decent neighbourhood had not prepared her to be suspicious in such a case. That the horrid woman had some hold upon the young man was obvious. Ella, accounting for it by supposing that she was some near relation, sister or wife, pitied him, and turned her attention to the person who claimed it next. This happened to be Mr. Gregor Strangworth, who kept her standing while he gave her the whole history of lace, which took a considerable time.

But, afterwards, when asked what she thought of Gregor Strangworth, she smiled her loveliest, as at a pleasant recollection.

"Exceptional," she answered enigmatically.

CHAPTER II

LORD TERRY DE BEACH AND HIS JULIUS

1

THE Lace Show provided small talk for the idle longer than would have been the case but for Mr. Harkles's ingenious suggestion that there was a mystery about that girl. Gossip continued to reject the simple truth as not profitable enough for its purposes, and theories multiplied, were expanded, exhausted themselves in discussion, and were abandoned for lack of evidence to support them, but left a residue which resolved itself into one article of faith. Beauty in an ambiguous position was expected to be frail, but men found themselves bound to acknowledge that Ella Banks was "all right." They said she was "all right," but they said it as they repeated "I believe in the resurrection of the body" when they went to church. If it had come to attesting their faith in either case on oath they would not have sworn. Lord Terry de Beach was one of these unconvinced believers. He judged the girl as by nature "all right," but such a girl might have a past. The American Millionairess theory he rejected as absurd, and the small farmhouse as a cradle left too much to be accounted for. Her refinement, her ease of manner, and above all the unconscious pride of her bearing bespoke pedigree, but why this concealment?—To give her a fresh start, that was one of the conclusions he leant to. Settin' her up like that might be a *quid pro quo*, a *solatium*. You never know what young men may be up to, and, as Harkles said, there were those two Brabant boys.

Lord Terry determined to get the truth out of old Ninny (the Duke's school contemporaries called him Ninny only because his Christian name was Ninian. No aspersion on his wits was intended) in private for the satisfaction of his own curiosity. Since their Eton days old Ninny had had good reason to know that the Terrier could be discreet! The Terrier was to be

trusted to hold his tongue! Accordingly the Terrier awaited a favourable opportunity, and he found it one night when he and the Duke, tempted by the fine weather, were walking home from different places and happened to encounter each other.

Lord Terry introduced the subject tactfully. Lace first, then the Lace Girl—"Beautiful creature!"

"My wife's *protégée*," said the Duke. That was all. No emphasis, but Lord Terry de Beach required none. An "Outsider" would have persisted, but to Lord Terry's trained perception of nice shades of meaning the tone was enough. The Lace Girl was taboo, and of necessity the subject dropped.

"Boys satisfactory?" he asked, as if by way of changing it, but really in the hope of getting a side-light on the matter which interested him, his only chance.

"Quite, thank you," said the Duke, and paused. "Nice fellows—though perhaps I shouldn't say so myself," he added. "Never gave me a moment's trouble, either of them. Eustace has returned to his Regiment. Melton is doing a leisurely tour round the world. Telegraphs from India just now. Telegraphs every day to reassure his mother. Mothers are apt to worry."

There was another pause, then the Duke began again: "Young men have changed since we were boys, De Beach. Are changing, I should say. Not general yet. I've observed it of late years, though I can't account for it. Seems sudden. But somewhere—beneath the surface—forces are at work. When we were young the manly thing was wine and—er—the rest of it. Now you hear them talk openly of 'a nice clean chap.' That's the modern hero, the new ideal—a nice clean chap."

"I don't like these damned changes myself," said De Beach. "One comfort, boys will be boys till the end of everything."

"At all events for some time to come," the Duke partially agreed. "Yes. Nice boys and nasty boys. The extremes. With several gradations of niceness and nastiness in between. I've observed that. Now, as I have just said, I observe that the nicer are on the increase."

"Degeneration, I say. Milksops on the increase," Lord Terry answered testily.

The Duke said something about the lovely weather, the charm and mystery of the London streets at night, and the good it did a man to take a turn before going to bed. He was fingering a latchkey he had in his pocket the while, but it was not the latchkey of the house in which his Duchess slumbered.

Lord Terry de Beach had it in mind that he had not himself come across any of the phenomenal young men the Duke professed to have observed, but he did not say so. He said, "Goodnight" instead, and took himself off abruptly, but he was not yet for bed. He wanted to thrash out this business of the Lace Girl with some understanding person, and there was not a better understanding person in these important matters than Mr. Harkles; therefore, late as was the hour, Lord Terry de Beach betook himself to Mr. Harkles's flat, where he knocked and rang and drummed and damned at the door pitilessly, until it was opened.

Mr. Harkles's man slept in another part of the building, and Mr. Harkles himself was in bed. His instinct of self-preservation was so strong that only on exceptional occasions did he ever neglect the means, of which, by general consent, rest and sleep in due season rank as amongst the most important. He appeared in a purple silk dressing-gown faced and lined with silver-grey, the exact colour of his hair, and his shapely feet were shod in soft grey suede. He was not asleep when the summons came. Rightly supposing that such a racket could only proceed from a privileged person, he thought at first of fire, and jumped out of bed; but recognising Lord Terry by his damns, he took time to freshen his face with cold water and touch it up in the proper places with powder, replace sundry teeth that were missing, and smooth his becoming locks. He would have done the same, probably, if it had been fire. At the point of death Mr. Harkles would have seen to it somehow that he looked as well as could be expected.

There was an odd sort of intimacy between him and Lord Terry de Beach—liking on one side or the other it could hardly be called—it was rather a linking together for mutual convenience. It was in the De Beach blood to get as much as possible out of the lower orders, both in the way of business and amusement; and it was equally in the blood of Mr. Harkles to feel honoured by notice of any kind from the class above.

The Duke, by his snub, had confirmed Lord Terry's suspicion that something about the Lace Girl was being concealed, therefore the snub did not rankle. A man has such joy of his own opinion that to have it confirmed, even by a snub, is a source of delight. The impression left on his mind by the rest of the conversation was that old Ninny had been fooling him to throw him off the scent.

"Sorry I have disturbed you," he said. "I just thought I'd look you up. I'm a bit of an owl myself, given to hunting the mice after dark, eh? So is my old chum, the Duke—Castlefield Saye, you know. I encountered him on the prowl, just now. Had a bit of a chat with him——"

Mr. Harkles's countenance cleared. He had not at first smiled encouragement on the disturber of his peace, whom he had unjustly supposed to be drunk; but the mention of the Duke brought the Lace Girl to mind. He knew that Lord Terry was interested in her, and was likely to have pumped the Duke. Mr. Harkles would have done extravagant things himself in a matter of such importance as the solving of a social problem on which many wits were being vainly exercised. The Terrier had perhaps worried the thing out, had beaten him in his own art of putting two and two together, and was come in exultation not to be contained, to let him know.

"What will you drink?" he asked, opening an elegant cabinet and displaying rows of bottles and siphons.

"'The dark Falernian wine,'" De Beach replied, with an assumption of youthful vivacity.

"The 'boy,' I suppose," Mr. Harkles interpreted, and proceeded to open a bottle of champagne.

"The 'boy'!" Lord Terry echoed. "Recalls the days of our youth. Nowadays that name is never heard. Times have changed. The Duke said so himself just now. He meant times are improving. I didn't agree. *I* say degeneration has set in and the symptom of it is barley-water. I feel it myself."

Mr. Harkles poured out a bumper in a curious, gold-spangled Venetian glass.

"Goblet of Hebe!" De Beach exclaimed as he took the glass in his hand. He held the wine up to the light and admired its colour, held it up to his nose and savoured the bouquet, held it up to his lips and drained it. "Nectar for the gods!" he called it. "Ain't you goin' to drink too?" he asked.

Mr. Harkles flipped the temptation to the four winds with his fingers.

"I envy," he said, "I respect and admire you. But for myself, at this time of night, really I must not."

"Tut, tut, damn rot!" the tempter protested, extending his glass for more. "Here, fill up! and I'll call the toast!"

It was in Mr. Harkles's blood to yield to superior rank, and he fell. With a brimming glass in one hand and the bottle

in the other he stood awaiting the toast. Lord Terry stood opposite, his tall hat rakishly tilted—he had not pretended respect for Mr. Harkles by taking it off—his dresscoat thrown back exhibiting a broad expanse of protuberant body covered with white waistcoat, his stork legs straddling, his glass upraised: "Here's to the good old times!" he cried, "and damn all" (several unprintable adjectives) "modern innovations!"

Mr. Harkles was strong on the "good old times," but when it came to damning "modern innovation" he faltered, partly because some "modern innovations" were much to his taste, also because he could not keep up with the adjectives. He admired Lord Terry's facility in the use of them, and would have modelled his own to correspond if he could; but in him the fighting basis was wanting, which in Lord Terry made the habit effective. There is no "swearing like a trooper" for a man who has never been a trooper in any combative faction. Mr. Harkles was apt to flinch like a woman when attacked, and only after he had run away did he think of the missiles which he might have hurled back in self-defence. Like the good old-fashioned "womanly woman," he eschewed fair fight in an open field, and relied upon "Influence," by which he meant intrigue, to achieve his ends. *Blanc de Ninon* is not the powder to make heavy projectiles carry.

But Mr. Harkles only fell to the extent of one brimming glass. He could be obstinate when it was a question of endangering his complexion and general fitness. Lord Terry jeered at his abstinence: "There's no time like the present, my Julius," he reminded him. "Any chance may be your last chance. Man is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upwards, here to-day and gone to-morrow; but the gods are merciful and give him for his solace wine, women, and song!"

He churred like a merry corncrake, then lifting his glass, began to lilt:

"Let school-masters puzzle their brain
With grammar and nonsense and learning,
Good liquor I stoutly maintain
Gives genius a better discerning.
Let them brag of their heathenish gods,
Their Lethes, their Styxes, and Stygians:
Their quis, and their quos, and their quods,

They're all but a parcel of pigeons.
Torroddle, toroddle, toroll—"

"Sing up, Harkles!" and Mr. Harkles sang up.

The spicy old ditty carried them back to their youth, released their energy from its rusty springs, spurred them to activity. Mr. Harkles swung the bottle, they clinked glasses, repeated the chorus, pointed a dancing toe at each other, and jigged it till they were both exhausted. Mr. Harkles whirling in his dressing-gown with much display of purple pyjamas striped with grey, and Lord Terry with his tall hat on one side and his stork-legs encumbered with his protuberant body, doing their active best, was a spectacle so moving in every sense of the word that the dancers themselves finally collapsed into chairs, upon which they lay extended, shouting with laughter.

"Lord! Lord!" the Terrier exclaimed, wiping his eyes. "If they could see us, the rotten youngsters of to-day, with their cat-laps! What boys we were! Never say die, eh?"

"Certainly not!" Mr. Harkles rejoined, offering him boxes of cigars and cigarettes. "Smoke? No!"

"Barbarous! With wine like this! With any wine, riskin' your palate, my good man!" Lord Terry corncraked, scandalised, and swore till he was out of breath, then settled down to the bottle.

Mr. Harkles looked contrite, but lit a cigarette all the same, for the sake of the action. It was a bit of business to help out a vital question, as of no importance except to keep up the conversation.

"By the way," he asked, "did you say you had seen the Duke?" Mr. Harkles, in his speech, carefully kept his distance between himself and his noble friends. He was not to be trapped by familiarity into the vulgarity of speaking to men of superior rank familiarly of each other; consequently, finding that Harkles never presumed, men of superior rank let themselves go when talking to him.

"Yes, and be damned to him!" the Terrier exclaimed. The wine on top of earlier potations was muddling him, but he remembered the object of his visit, also the necessity of minding what you said to Harkles. Must get round to the subject diplomatically—head him in the right direction. Talk of old Ninny, and he'd arrive at the Corner House of himself. Association of ideas and that sort of thing. A cunning allusion to

the Brabant boys would do the trick. Under the impression that he had made the allusion, he gave it as his opinion that old Ninny had bluffed. He was disappointed in old Ninny after all these years. Old Ninny might have trusted him. He'd have respected a confidence. He hoped he was a gentleman.

An association of ideas naturally followed in Mr. Harkles's mind:

"The Duke bluffed about the Lace Girl!" he exclaimed.

"Eh, sir, wot d'ye mean?" The Terrier was down on him. "The Duke and the Lace Girl? Wot's the Duke got to do with the Lace Girl?"

"Nothing that I know of," Mr. Harkles answered, affecting to smother a yawn.

Lord Terry had not thought of the Duke before as a principal in the Corner House mystery, but this accidental coupling of his name with the Lace Girl's suggested the possibility. He would have eaten Harkles rather than have set him off on such a scent: "Nothin' that you know of, Mr. Harkles," he blustered, "and nothin' that anybody else knows of. The Duke was buckin' about those two precious boys of his. Nincompoops, I call 'em."

"Quite so," said Mr. Harkles, rising to uncork another bottle. Wine casts the tongue adrift and Mr. Harkles had only to wait. The mental fog was gathering, and Lord Terry was bound to lose his way in it sooner or later.

"What do you think of this wine?" Mr. Harkles asked. "It's some I'm trying, and I'd be obliged if you'd give me your opinion. I'm no connoisseur myself."

Lord Terry was pleased to oblige. He continued to oblige indiscreetly, and gradually Mr. Harkles rose in his estimation. He confessed that it did him good to talk to his Julius. He knew it would, that was why he'd turned up. He told his Julius affectionately that he was a good sort; he never bluffed. He wasn't sayin' that Ninny wasn't a good sort, but he did bluff about those boys of his. All Ninny's family geese were swans. Ninny had somethin' in him at one time——

He broke off abruptly here, and reflected awhile. The Lace Girl and Ninny—that was a new idea, but Harkles mustn't get hold of it. He must give him a lead in another direction. "When a man has a wife who's hell on respectability and gives in to her damned nonsense, wot can y' expect?" he asked, too befogged by this time to know that he was leading in the direc-

tion he intended to avoid. "A man should stand on his dignity as a man—no hole-and-corner business; do wot y' like openly—only one fight for it. It's your Mrs. Tom, Dick, and Harry that keep up the perpetual row. Rank has too much to lose. Rank does the ignorin' business beaut'fully when she's put to it. A man shouldn't play the fool with his liberty—shouldn't give in till he's a slave to keepin' up appearances." The general principle eluded him here, and Ninny's case in particular presented itself: "You may take your oath," he concluded, "that when a man bluffs he has somethin' to conceal. Eh, wot d'ye think? *You* needn't be partic'lar, of course; but a man with the eye of public upon-imsh got to be p'tic'lar. Somethin' to conceal, thash wa' I shay. Eh? Wot d'ye think?"

Mr. Harkles thought that two and two make four, and smiled the complacent smile of a man who has got his figures right at last.

"Time will show!" he answered obscurely. "Human nature is full of surprises, and what human nature will or will not do is no more to be reckoned on than if it was a woman. What it is wisest to expect is the unexpected!"

Lord Terry, mellow with wine, took a jovial leave of his Julius, with the repeated assurance that he was "A jolly old rag doll!"

Mr. Harkles, incapable of violence, restrained an inclination to kick him.

"Rag doll, indeed!"

2

Next day Lord Terry de Beach was in a room with some few other men at the Land and Leisure Club, looking out of a window. There were always men at the windows of the Land and Leisure Club. Little things amused them. A hurdy-gurdy with a monkey on it, pretty women in carriages or on foot, the police with a prisoner, the perennial internecine combats of newspaper boys,—all such passing drama of the street was a continual source of entertainment; and an accident in front of the Club would fill the windows with old and young, eagerly curious as children delighting in thrills.

To-day a brass band was the attraction. It had been heard in the distance, approaching, playing a rollicking march. It stopped outside the Club, finished the tune, broke up and dis-

persed in fragments. The few members present who had gone to the window, returned to their seats. This band came often, marching to its own music, always stopped outside the Club, finished the tune, and made off. The proceeding was a puzzle. Members had offered the bandsmen money, but they would not take it, neither would they answer questions nor play again when asked. They were dressed exceedingly well, in black, but the style and cut were more like a livery than a uniform.

"Jolly good music," said Ballard and Sarb. "I could listen a bit if they'd stop. Who the devil are they?"

Lord Terry de Beach's eyebrows worked, the pointed ends of his white moustache quivered upwards.

"I believe you know!" Ballard and Sarb exclaimed. "You might tell us!"

"Delighted to oblige ye noble lord," said Terry de Beach. "It is ye private band of ye Count of Monte Christo. He keeps it to play to him when he takes exercise. Finds it exhilaratin'. Says walkin's a bore without a band, but play him a tune, and he'll do any distance."

"Sure, yer honour's full of jokes!" The O'Haleron observed.

"You don't believe me!" Lord Terry rejoined, working his eyebrows comically, in affected surprise. "Well, there! Way of the world! Nobody attends to the truth till he's damned for disbelieving."

The O'Haleron was an impoverished young Irish landowner, just able to hold on with both hands and good luck at cards, in an English Cavalry Regiment. He was standing now with his back to the fireplace, whence he could see across the big room into the entrance hall beyond. Presently Gregor Strangworth appeared there and disappeared.

"Great Scott!" The O'Haleron sighed. "*The Encyclopédie Universelle* is in the Club. Preserve us! We'll be getting information by the bushel presently. If I sit down, I'll stand it better."

"Bull," said Filmer Dabbs laconically.

"Bull yourself," The O'Haleron retorted genially, running both hands up through his hair. "But, now, Mr. Filmer Dabbs, will ye be so very good and kind and so obligin' as to give us yer English idea of an Irish bull?"

"Oh——" Filmer Dabbs prolonged the interjection to give himself time to visit his memory. Originality was not his forte. "Well," he gave it at last, "when you see six cows

lying down in a field, and one of them is standing up, that's a bull."

"Indade!" The O'Haleron gravely nodded his head to one side, his blue eyes glanced from one to another of the men sitting round, and covert smiles responded. "Indade!" he repeated. "Is that so?"

Callowabbey wondered why "Great Scott, the old blighter!" hung about their clique so much. Col Drindon, who had just come in, replied: "My theory is that he is after the department of knowledge which was left unfurnished in his innocent youth!"

"Oh, then he's come to the right place!" Ballard and Sarb conceded. "We're experts in all that isn't innocent here, eh, sir?"—this to Lord Terry de Beach.

"Not a doubt of it," Lord Terry replied. "If Strangworth's for acquiring a knowledge of the side of life with which an innocent youth would be unacquainted, here's his opportunity." He cackled inharmoniously. "See you again this evening, dear boy!" he added, addressing Col, and took himself off.

Col Drindon had drawn together a following of his own from among the younger members of the Club. Lord Terry hung about the group for the purpose of warming his age-chilled senses at the fires of their youth, even as a disembodied spirit might have come and looked on, envious of the pleasures it could no longer share for lack of the organic structure from which it had erstwhile derived its powers of enjoyment. Mr. Harkles also frequented their gatherings, his excuse being that they did him good and he hoped to return the service. It may be that the decay of his own power to enjoy was arrested by imbibing the subtle stimulant which youth exhales, but there is no record of the return service he professed ever having been rendered. The youngsters, as a rule, combined to dodge the older men who had a liking for their company, but these two they admitted to their games, Lord Terry de Beach perforce because Col was attached to him and devoted himself to his amusement; but also because the wealthy old sinner was in a powerful position and could do a lot for you, don't you know. Mr. Harkles they tolerated for love of his gossip, and also because he was such a knowing devil.

The Land and Leisure Club was a nursery for hereditary statesmen, coming politicians, and public servants generally.

To be blackballed by the Club handicapped a man for life; to be accused of discreditable conduct as a member cast a blight upon his chances; to be expelled was social extinction. Conduct, therefore, had to be circumspect—on the surface, at all events; disturb the surface with a ripple and you didn't know where you might be. The youngsters accordingly "played up" to the best of their ability; lounging about, lolling in easy-chairs, looking out of the windows, playing games, talking discreetly, marking time generally with a succession of drinks, to ease restraint. But there was wild blood in them, and the restless spirit of hard-drinking, duelling ancestors, who gambled with all they possessed, including their lives, fought against their interests, at times irrepressibly. Col and his friends had kicked over the traces even in the Club itself, to the extent of talking loudly enough to rouse from their naps Greyheads, whose habits of mind induced a chronic state of napping,—thus creating a disturbance, a grave offence. Col, privately warned that if he and his "Chattering Parrots!" could not curb their exuberance they had better find an outlet for it elsewhere, had taken the hint, and thereafter, when the necessity arose, he entertained them beyond the precincts in presumably safer surroundings.

This evening they were chattering at their ease in a private room in the most influentially frequented hotel of the moment. Dinner was over, and Col, the centre of the group, had taken up his usual position, stretched out full length, on a broad, leather-covered lounge. Waiters passed to and fro, noiselessly clearing the small tables of such litter of ash-trays, empty coffee-cups, liqueur-glasses, and tumblers, as had collected, and renewing supplies of refreshment according to order. Lord Terry de Beach had a decanter of whisky and a couple of siphons placed at his elbow. A cloud of cigarette and cigar smoke, formed by the many mickles that make a pickle, ascending to the ceiling, hung overhead. Mr. Harkles, for the sake of his trousers, sat upright, but the rest, for the most part, lounged in every sort of easy attitude, in the deepest armchairs. The boys, old and young, were evidently making a night of it.

The Sliver set them off. There was nothing much doing until he arrived, dressed in a tweed travelling-suit as though fresh from a journey, and remarked casually, also untruthfully, that he was just back from Paris, and had run in to apologise for not turning up to dinner.

"Why, Sliver, I saw you only yesterday morning," said Burly Bill.

The general aim of the nicknames rife among them was to signal some trait which was absent. Ballard and Sarb was called Burly Bill because he was a particularly dapper little man, with small, high-arched feet, and dainty, white, effeminate hands. He had been the joy of his dancing master, whom he resembled in a trick he had of standing poised as if ready to dance. Nevertheless, there was a certain something of distinction about him, especially when he chose, which made it impossible to mistake him for a dancing master.

"What infernal purpose took you to Paris and back by telegraph?" Callowabbey asked.

"Oh, I just ran over to have a look at the Winged Victory," the Sliver answered carelessly. "I wanted to refresh my memory. I couldn't recall the likeness to the Lace Girl you fellows seem to see."

While he was speaking a servant brought him a bubbling glass on a tray, and was standing patiently waiting for him to take it. He chose to see it now, and made an effective pause while he drained it, and wiped his moustache. "You were all jolly well right," he resumed impressively. "The resemblance is unmistakable. I saw it at once."

Col raised himself on his elbow and looked at him with deceitful gravity.

"In the face, I suppose," he said.

"Where else?" the Sliver blustered.

"Clever fellow," Col sighed, and sank back on his sofa.

Lord Terry was the first to see it. He rocked in his chair with suppressed emotion, and other eyes were opened. The Sliver had given himself away, but they were not going to let him know it. The Sliver's artless lies were a part of his charm, and they feared to discourage him. Here was a chance of prolonged torment of an ingenious kind, which would hurt without letting him know where he was hit. Lord Terry, spluttering in the effort to restrain his mirth, had to be warned. Col, assuming that he was choking, advised him to drink, and Burly Bill, taking the cue, got in the words, "Let's draw him," while pretending to pat his back, the rest looking on with affected concern.

It was an old "draw," but a hardy perennial.

There was a pause, during which Col caught an invitation in

the eyes of one and another to fire the first shot. He gazed up at the ceiling, dreamily.

"I envy you, Sliver," he sighed. "I always envy the last man to look at that pure embodiment of immortal loveliness! Did you notice her lips? The smiling intentness of her lips fascinates me. O Sliver! did you notice her lips?"

"Particularly," said the Sliver, with an appreciative smack of his own.

"And her eyes?" Col proceeded. "Her eyes on the far-away goal for which she is making—wings fluttering, tiny feet treading on air, impatient to be off! She'll reach it too—her goal—or she wouldn't be the Winged Victory! Looking at that face, reading all that it expresses, did you not ask yourself, I wonder, 'What is her goal, and where?'"

They were all listening with varying expressions of approval and amusement. The Sliver felt himself the man of the moment. He had felt safe so far, but perceived a risk here, and determined not to run it.

"Well, not exactly," he answered, with modest candour. "I —I—— Well, you see, she's the sort of thing you think about afterwards——"

"That's so," from one and another of the group.

"In her presence," the Sliver, much encouraged, pursued, "looking at that face, as you say, you don't think——"

"No, no, of course not!" Col exclaimed. "You feel!"

"But I'd like to know what she's up to," said the Sliver.

"Ah! so should *I*," said Col. "I'd give all my life that must be lived apart from her, to know!"

"You'd think he meant it," Lord Terry whispered to Mr. Harkles, who was sitting beside him.

"Ye—yes," that gentleman hesitated. He had been closely observing Col, and at the same time putting two and two together. "Yes—if he doesn't mean it," he concluded.

"But one thing," Col added energetically, "one thing I'm damned certain of. Whatever goal the Winged Victory is making for is—is worthy of the Winged Victory."

"Well, if it works out religious it will be a surprise to this section of the British Public," Lord Terry said, tapping his breast.

Mr. Strangworth looked in by accident. He was staying in the hotel and had mistaken the room for his own. Col jumped up, hospitably intent on capturing him for the eve-

ning. The colloquy took place at the door, out of earshot of the others.

"Great Scott!" the warning went round meanwhile.

"He'll give the show away," Callowabbey mourned.

"I'll bet you a hundred to one he don't," Lord Terry rejoined. "I'll bet anybody any odds you like, he don't!"

The number of betting-books immediately brought into service made it evident that Great Scott was expected to be too obtuse to perceive that "a draw" was on.

"What on earth are you all at?" the Sliver asked. "'He will' 'he won't' *what?*"

"He will or he won't think you a hero," O'Haleron rejoined.

"I'll bet he won't," said the Sliver, but nobody taking him up he elaborated the pose of distinction modestly self-deprecative. "What's there heroic in running over to Paris to have a look at the Winged Victory?" he asked.

Mr. Strangworth, having decided to stay, had come within hearing.

"The Winged Victory," he repeated, "the Winged Victory of Samothrace?"—the didactic note sounded in his gentlemanly voice—"the most precious treasure of Art in the collection at the Louvre, second to none, I say, not even to the Venus of Milo."

"The Sliver has just made a bolt to Paris and back for the sole purpose of comparing her with the Lace Girl, who is said to resemble her," Mr. Harkles interrupted, hoping to save the situation. "So he *says*," he added with emphasis. "He was just giving us his impression of the expression he discovered——"

"Are you speaking of the Winged Victory of Samothrace?" Mr. Strangworth asked, beaming on them all with benevolent stupidity. "There are other Victories. Some say that the Milo is not a Venus but a Victory. The Winged Victory of Samothrace has no——"

Callowabbey uttered a yell that stopped him. The old marplot in another moment would have spoilt their fun with his blasted information.

"I beg your pardon," Callowabbey apologised. "Put the lighted end of my cigarette into my mouth."

But Mr. Strangworth was only startled into silence for an instant.

"The Winged Victory of Samothrace has lost——" he was

beginning again deliberately, but this time Col Drindon held him up with a vigorous gesture.

"Great Scott!" he groaned.

"Great Scott with a vengeance!" said several under their breath.

"Strangworth, *dear,* don't—don't!" Col implored. "Don't tell us! 'Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise!'"

"Shakespeare!" Filmer Dabbs exclaimed, as if there were a prize to be won by getting it in first.

"My dear sir!" Mr. Strangworth protested, in the tone of a wise teacher tolerant of mistakes in the young, but knowing his duty better than to let them pass uncorrected. Speaking so he only required thick glasses through which to beam upon them, to convert him into a perfect specimen of the benevolent pedagogue. "Not the Bard of Avon! It was Thomas Gray who wrote those lines. They conclude a stanza in his justly celebrated poem which is generally known as 'Gray's Elegy.' Prior, in an address to the Honourable Charles Montague, expressed the same thought in different words:

"From ignorance our comfort flows,
The only wretched are the wise.

And it is probable that both Prior and Gray were indebted to Ecclesiastes i. 18, where it is written, *He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.* But I was going to say, Colin——"

"Don't say it!" Col again interrupted. "Leave something to the imagination!"

"But," Mr. Strangworth remonstrated, "even a poet should be sure of his facts. Facts are food for the mind."

"The mind must not gorge itself, Gregor dear," Col argued. "A surfeit of facts clogs the normal healthy action of the mind, and its normal healthy action thus inhibited, secondary symptoms of a morbid character supervene. The whole energy of a mind overcharged with facts is concentrated on relieving itself, and the unpleasant symptoms of this overcharge appears in the chronic disposition of the sufferer to vomit facts on the slightest provocation."

Glasses and cigarettes were suspended while Col thus delivered himself. His intimates had learned to look for grains of corn in his chaff.

"Col is a deuced clever fellow," they warned each other.

"Don't you be taken in, he's only half fooling the whole time. Our Joyday knows a thing or two and no mistake!"

His pleasant, cultivated voice, his unemphatic delivery which refined even his swear-words, and his air of "speaking with due deference to you, sir," made it difficult to believe that he was only fooling now. The affectation of learned language was of course intended to impose on the guileless Savant, whose next words,—so it was inferred with delight—proved that Col had succeeded in deluding him.

"I don't—quite—follow you," Mr. Strangworth slowly enunciated.

"That is unnecessary," was Col's polite assurance. "A man of your high attainments cannot be expected to trouble himself to follow the divagations of a lisping babe, to whom Being is still in the state of Becoming. The confusion between Seeming and Reality takes time to resolve, and Youth has not had time to arrive at a clear differentiation. That is the bane of Youth. But, I must ask you: Does a mind so full of facts, that there is no room in it for the exercise of any of its attributes but memory, ever soar in thought? Do we find in Milton, in Dante, in any poetry that rises to the sublime, a fabric of facts?"

"How about Homer?" Mr. Strangworth asked.

"Homer was the journalist of his day," Col rejoined. "Think of Milton's astronomy! Yet Milton had talked with Galileo! Did he use the Copernican system in Paradise Lost?"

"No," said Mr. Strangworth. "He pandered to the popular taste of the day with the Alphonsine improvement on the Ptolemaic system——"

Col checked the flow: "He scorned the Galileon fact and rose to the Sublime on the wings of the Ptolemaic fancy! You talk of the weight of facts, and the expression is just and significant. The weight of facts cripples the flight of the spirit. The wings of a spirit weighted with facts are powerless to expand. That we see in the degeneration of literature and art, which is such a painful symptom of the dry-rot to which the worker in every branch of art is so liable to fall a victim in this degenerate age. Fact, however nasty, is worked to death as the all-important thing. A poet, sir, should wave a wand, not wield a bludgeon! Keats waved a wand, Shelley waved a wand, Rossetti, Swinburne! They waved their wands and the air was filled with music! But our friend Cantripp! He wields his

bludgeon of a mind and we are mired in facts—dirty little facts no poet should stoop to record for shame of their ugliness. When Cantripp wanders—

> . . . . *past the rills*
> *Where, bending low, the frequent daffodils,*
> *Proffer their golden crowns in homage that he loves,*

he pauses to mention the manure at their roots. So I say, no facts for me! I beg you to leave something to the imagination."

"But surely a judicious admixture," Mr. Strangworth was beginning, spurred to the encounter. "You read your Shakespeare——"

"Excuse me," Col interrupted. "I don't read my Shakespeare. I don't want to know my Shakespeare. My Shakespeare is too damned disheartening for a fellow in his own way of business, especially when that fellow is only in a small way. If I knew my Shakespeare I should find myself with nothing left to say on any mortal subject under the sun. There is an excuse for talking Shakespeare without being aware of it since needs must, but heaven forbid that we should knowingly plagiarise even those items which he doubtless gave as evidence of the limitless range of his mighty powers. As an honest man, if I knew my Shakespeare, I should have to traverse this Vale of Tears in inverted commas, which would be inconvenient. Never again mention that egregious monopolist to me! Who knows but that I might have said a good thing myself if Shakespeare hadn't already said the best of everything in the best possible manner on every conceivable subject! Moreover I say this—if Shakespeare had had the number of facts imposed upon him with which we moderns are crammed, his creative faculty would have been crowded out."

"You convict yourself of inconsistency," said Mr. Strangworth. "You say that Shakespeare has used up all the available material and left you nothing to descant upon, yet you betray an acquaintance both with Shakespeare and with subjects only discovered since his time. But, at any rate, I cannot see how the fact that I was about to mention——"

The pleasure of thwarting his desire to mention this fact by keeping him off his subject was now a lively part of the entertainment. This time it was Ballard and Sarb who stopped him with an exclamation:

. . . . . *"surely some kind friend will come*
To bury me, bury me
Deeper ever so little deeper."

He quoted with tragic emphasis, intending a hit at the impending fact, to keep them on the alert; but the immediate effect of the quotation was to let loose their ribald mirth in a new direction. Lady Ballard and Sarb's name was *Maud.*

"Burly Bill quoting his 'Maud,'" Callowabbey exclaimed.

"I'd not have thought he was up to *Maud,* but ye niver know," said The O'Haleron demurely, with a covert glance at Col.

There was an attempt to keep countenance, for the subject was risky, but the innuendo was too much for their gravity.

Mr. Strangworth asked to have the joke explained to him, as he had not observed anything humorous in "Maud." This fairly convulsed them.

Ballard and Sarb glanced sharply from one to another, but surprised no sign he could act upon. The laughter was not prolonged. There was a general post to make a diversion. Filmer Dabbs got up a tiff with The O'Haleron by upsetting an ash-tray on his head, and drinks were loudly called for. When they settled down again, Mr. Harkles tactfully tried to change the subject.

"There are some fine lines in Cantripp's last poem," he was beginning. But Lord Terry de Beach, intent upon keeping the ball rolling, defeated his amiable purpose.

"For fine lines give me 'Maud'!" he burst out, and set them all in a roar. Ballard and Sarb looked glummer and glummer; but he was just sober enough to feel the impropriety of mentioning his wife, besides seeing the certainty of being made a fool of if he accused them of intentional disrespect. Mr. Strangworth justified their tolerance of his existence in their midst. By loudly exclaiming that the room was suffocating and opening a window he created a diversion. But he settled down to his subject once more. He would have his say; they knew that; and made ready to thwart him.

"Avoiding the point which seems to be distasteful to you," he began, beaming upon Col—

Upon this, Lord Terry took out his betting book and tapped it significantly, and a period of depression set in, an interval of silent prayer to Lord Terry to be merciful, for the bets had

been more heroic than wise. Meanwhile the blighter jawed, but not at his ease.

"The various surmises with regard to the history of the Winged Victory of Samothrace," he continued—

"O fie!" Burly Bill interrupted. "If she is a lady with a past, I protest. I'm a married man, and I object to the subject. It isn't proper."

"Do leave her in peace at the Louvre," sighed Col.

"Ah!" Mr. Strangworth caught him up. "It is not peace which that animated form so eloquently expresses. Peace follows Victory——"

"The ruffian!" Lord Terry interposed.

"I thought you hanged Peace," said The O'Haleron.

"May be a son of his, chip of the old block," Filmer Dabbs, junior, suggested.

"Like father like son," the Sliver supposed.

"Not in your case, Sliver," said Col. "It has never been said of the worthy Dean, your father, that there is no truth in him."

The Sliver grinned. "It has been said that Filmer Dabbs, junior, is a Dabbs at making black white," he said.

"Set a thief to catch a thief," slipped from Mr. Harkles unawares.

So far, the feeblest jests had been honoured with whole-hearted laughter, but these were not, and Filmer felt the difference. It was in their blood to keep him in his place; but once they "let him know," they had done with him till next time. And it was in his blood both to overstep the limit and to remember the kick that sent him back. Self-interest was the working principle that he professed to himself, but his impudent assurance and inordinate self-esteem made him incautious, and also vindictive. To be successful in Filmer's way of business, a man has need to suppress all of himself that is not native to the environment in which he works, and it was just in the respects in which he was other than his better bred associates that he was apt to be irrepressible. Another thing hampered him too. He was a cur, but not a cowardly cur. When his blood was up he hit back on the spot. But his enemies did not often give him the kind of provocation which gets the blood up in a moment. It was usually as an after-effect that he felt their darts; consequently he had time to think how best to retaliate safely. The underlying contempt which saw nothing

to laugh at in the jests made at his expense roused him now, but it was an occasion to prick not to hit, and he saw a way to prick them by stopping their game with the Sliver. He could bring enlightenment through Mr. Strangworth to that youth which should show him where he had put himself with his lies.

"You were telling us, sir," he began. "The statue, you know, the expression——"

"The expression!" Col got in first. "A woman resplendent with vigour!"

"And exquisite in the vibrating rhythm of her movements, yes!" Mr. Strangworth exclaimed, beaming approval on his intelligent young friend. "A figure in which the form and the function are in perfect harmony, as has been pointed out, a magnificent realisation in marble of a vision of Beauty, rendered by a great and skilful artist—probably Skopas—who belonged, like Praxiteles and Lysippus, to the fourth century, B. C. It would be interesting to know who was the model. It is probably a portrait, it may be of Arsinoë herself, the daughter of Ptolemy Soter, and doubtless a splendid figure. But the dates don't agree, for it was in 280 B. C. that she escaped from her second husband, Ptolemy Ceraunus, who threatened her with death, and found asylum in Samothrace until she was able to pass into Egypt, where, in 278, she married her brother, Ptolemy II., Philadelphus."

"The disgusting female!" O'Haleron exclaimed.

"It was customary at that time," Mr. Strangworth said tolerantly. "The idea, happily, is repulsive to us, but it is a question whether brother and sister are nearer in point of consanguinity than first cousins. Half-brother and half-sister probably are not."

"It's a horrible notion annyway," the Irishman persisted.

"It is," Strangworth agreed. "So is the marriage of first cousins when you consider the consequences, but custom permits it. However, I was about to say that the Winged Victory bears evidence of the Attic taste of Phidias; but that amorous chiselling of the drapery suggests that the sculptor proceeded rather from Paionios. At any rate the rendering has all the force and the distinction of a temperament of the rarest refinement and the most delicate sensitiveness to the charm of feminine eurythmy. What do you think, Mr. Sliver? But perhaps you have not yet made the acquaintance of this masterpiece?"

"Oh, haven't I!" said the Sliver boastfully. "Look at my tweeds! Why, I am just back from Paris. I ran over for the sole purpose of having a good look at her. And I've done as much before, in the case of living ladies."

Ballard and Sarb exhaled a long spiral of smoke, and looked up at the ceiling. "Telegraphic work," he said meditatively.

"Youthful enthusiasm," Mr. Strangworth called it. "But now, Mr. Sliver, as to the expression? It would be interesting to hear so fresh an impression."

"'Her bright smile haunts me still,'" the Sliver replied, and beamed round on the company, delighted with the applause, which he attributed to appreciation of his aptness.

A tense moment followed, during which the presence of mind of the conspirators failed them for once. With their eyes on Mr. Strangworth they held their breath in anxious suspense.

Mr. Strangworth regarded the Sliver with interest.

"Ah, that!" he said, "now that—under the circumstances—requires explanation."

"Under the circumstances!" was rapturously repeated. "Our Gregor is coming out!"

This was good sport, and nobody would have spoilt it for the sake of his bet.

"Oh, Gregor, *dear,"* Col implored. "You are great and good, be magnanimous also! We are just a handful of poor neglected children in this big nursery. We confess that we are naughty sometimes; punish us if you think it necessary; but don't, don't deprive us of our plaything."

Again Mr. Strangworth beamed on him benevolently. "It was poor, half-witted Mr. Dick," he answered deliberately, "who introduced King Charles's head, in season and out of season."

A shout of appreciative laughter greeted this unexpected subtlety.

The Sliver began to be suspicious. What was amusing them so much?

"I don't see it," he complained. "I think you fellows are all mad to-night. What the devil has King Charles's head to do with anything?"

"You've not heard of Mr. Dick?" Mr. Strangworth asked with concern.

"No, I haven't heard of Mr. Dick," the Sliver answered irritably.

"Ah! Precisely!" Mr. Strangworth spoke in a satisfied

tone, like a doctor who has just extracted from a patient a confession of the symptom he suspected. "I was afraid you had not heard of Mr. Dick. A gentleman in your position should know the allusion. Allow me to——"

"Oh, blow and stow your information," the Sliver broke in rudely.

"That is my habit," said Mr. Strangworth. "But I reverse the order. I stow my information first and digest it; it is then ready to blow as occasion offers."

Lord Terry, who had been napping, woke up while Mr. Strangworth was speaking, and chuckled. "Goin' strong, Gregor," he said thickly. "Have a little inshpiration, and you'll do better still——" and he pushed his own private whisky bottle towards Mr. Strangworth suggestively. At the same time becoming aware of Mr. Harkles's proximity, he gurgled: "You too, my Shulius. Djolly ole rag doll!"

This was Lord Terry's last conscious contribution to the evening's entertainment. Having spoken, he subsided, and dozed audibly.

"It is not our occasional indulgences but our habitual excesses for which we are made to pay," Mr. Strangworth observed, and helped himself moderately, then passed the bottle to Mr. Harkles, who did likewise, but more generously. "'Jolly old rag doll,' indeed!" He required support.

It took time to restore his equanimity, and during an interval of retirement into himself, a question and some reflections passed through his mind. This strong-going of Mr. Strangworth's was not on his usual lines. Was there more in him than any of them had ever suspected? Or was it whisky? But it had preceded the whisky! A pity, for the whisky would have accounted for it. Mr. Harkles's thoughts wandered to whisky. Wonderful and bewildering at times is the unexpected effect of whisky! But the Terrier really should practise that honourable step not to o'erstep discretion in the company of these youngsters. Mr. Harkles's attention wandered to the youngsters. Ballard and Sarb was gazing into vacancy as though he were asleep with his eyes open; Joyday Flowers, flushed and animated, was scribbling in his pocketbook, doubtless catching one of those fugitive thoughts which made the quality of his verse so arresting; the Sliver looked morose; several of the others—(not enumerated here)—Mr. Harkles judged to be pretty well "sprung"; then he came to Filmer Dabbs.

And at Filmer Dabbs he paused. For Filmer Dabbs was gazing at Lord Terry with a most peculiar expression, and it was evident that Filmer Dabbs was very drunk. But he must have been overcome with extraordinary suddenness, for only just now he was speaking coherently!

Presently, to Mr. Harkles's amazement, Filmer carefully gathered himself up on his feet, staggered across the room to Lord Terry's side, sat down on the arm of his chair, smacked his bald head, and called him "Old Polished Poll."

Lord Terry, rousing himself and smiling at Filmer fatuously, rejoined that Filmer was his own dear boy, and, stretching out his arm, would have embraced him had not Filmer dodged the proffered caress. Lord Terry, blindly groping, missed his shot, and nearly overbalanced. As he recovered himself, Col Drindon came into his line of sight. Thereupon he consigned the whole family of Dabbs to hell and transferred his affections to Col. "Col," he solemnly announced, "Col ish my own dear boy!" Then, as if he had realised that the phrase was open to misconstruction, he insisted again and again on its being understood that Col was his father's son. The reiteration of this assertion suggested a congenial line of inquiry to Mr. Harkles, who hurriedly made a mental note to revive in his recollection all that he knew and had heard of Lady Drindon, in order to find two twos to put together on the subject of Col's paternity.

But Col himself suddenly and energetically ruffled his fair head with both hands till his hair stood on end all over it, and, kicking up his heels, brought himself off the sofa and on to the floor at a bound. "Did I see you take a liberty with Lord Terry de Beach, and hear you speak to him disrespectfully?" he shouted at Filmer Dabbs.

"I smacked his bald pate and called him Old Polished Poll," Filmer shouted back defiantly, and with surprising clearness for a man who was staggering drunk.

"Chuck him out!"

The cry brought them all swarming round Filmer, on whom Col himself laid hands, but Filmer got in a blow which sent Col reeling back on Callowabbey and downed them both in a heap.

With the outbreak of the fracas, the respectable Mr. Harkles promptly slipped away home. He was still fuming at the "Jolly old rag doll" offence, and wasn't going to risk anything for Lord Terry de Beach.

But Mr. Strangworth as promptly sprang into the *mêlée*.

"You confounded young fools!" he shouted, and his voice was a voice they had not heard before, a stentorian voice of command, and his arms were flails. But the hooligan in them was up; their shouts drowned his protests; they made for Filmer, but, in the excitement and confusion of the moment (so they excused themselves afterwards) some of them mistook their man, and both were seized. There were three doors to the room; haphazard they pitched on the nearest; it opened on to a narrow passage, along which they hustled their victims to an archway covered by a curtain; through this they flung them down a short flight of shallow steps into a public drawing-room full of fashionably-dressed people. Women shrieked, men sprang to their feet, and the young scamps, seeing where they had got to, turned back, and bolted incontinently, leaving Strangworth and Filmer to get themselves out of the mess as best they could. Filmer sprang nimbly to his feet, and made his escape, but Strangworth had fallen heavily and had to be helped up. He found himself facing the man of all others in the Land and Leisure Club whom it was most dangerous for the youngsters to provoke.

"Strangworth!" the personage exclaimed in amazement, on recognising the dishevelled gentleman.

"I must apologise for causing such a commotion," Strangworth rejoined, raising his voice. "I fell."

"I saw what happened," the personage replied, implacably.

"I'll see you later," Strangworth said.

The hotel manager came fussing up in a rage.

"Mr. Strangworth!" he too exclaimed in amazement.

"An unfortunate accident," Strangworth blandly explained.

"They shall pay for it who caused it," the manager threatened in an undertone.

"We will discuss the price in private," Strangworth whispered significantly.

They left the room together, Strangworth with what dignity he could in a coat split up behind to the collar.

Later, in the character of human being, he returned to the scene of the fracas, to see to Lord Terry de Beach. Col had been badly hurt, and the other young scamps had made off, taking him with them. Not a man was about now but Strangworth, as Lord Terry cannot be said to have been about. He was still there, however, and helpless, wrapped from the world hypnotically in a trance induced by incessant repetition of the

formula: "Col's shun ofsh father." He had sat like the bonze he looked during the fracas, insensible to the warring clash of class against class which was being waged about him on his account. Mr. Strangworth found him sunk in his chair, with his eyes shut, and still repeating affably at intervals: "Nish chap, Col. Colsh my shun." Then, after a pause, correcting himself: "Colsh shun ofsh father."

Mr. Strangworth stood contemplating him for some minutes, then he addressed him: "A man who wasn't his father's son would be a *lusus naturæ*," he pointed out, stayed by habit to correct; but that point settled, he got to business. "You *disreputable* old ruin," he began, apostrophising the unconscious nobleman. "You bald-headed, pot-bellied, lean-shanked *disgrace*—what's to be done with you?"

The familiar voice partially roused Lord Terry. He opened his eyes and looked up.

"Eh?" he said. "You ole Strangworth, eh? Confounded ole bore!"

"Confounded old beast," Strangworth retorted.

"Beasht . . . whosh beasht?" Lord Terry demanded combatively.

"You are. A beast in a confoundedly beastly state. Here! pull yourself together! D'ye hear? You're to pull yourself together!—I don't wonder that other beauty, your boon companion, the delectable Harkles, has deserted you!"

"Harklesh disherted me! My own Harklesh!" This seemed to Lord Terry infinitely pathetic, and he burst into tears.

"Old woman's relief," Mr. Strangworth muttered, and let the tears flow for a little, standing the while pinching his chin, and meditatively contemplating the object of his animadversion.

"Who's to get you home in such a state?" he asked at last. "Well, I suppose I must do it myself"—with which he walked off briskly to fetch the hall porter, a man who could be trusted to act discreetly in the interests of all concerned.

Mr. Strangworth accompanied the Right Honourable the Earl Terry de Beach of Louden in the cab he had had the foresight to order, for the charitable purpose of seeing him safely deposited in his own home. The noble gentleman had been made happy on the floor of the cab, like a piece of luggage, at Mr. Strangworth's feet, the only seat from which he could be trusted not to fall off.

As the cab lumbered past the Land and Leisure Club, Mr. Strangworth looked up at its imposing façade, and it seemed to him that the Club looked down upon him coldly and contemptuously, as though confident in its power to assert and maintain its plutocratic dignity by means of the hypocritical calm and grandeur of the high patrician front it presented to the democratic masses, which, despising, imposing upon, and covertly insulting, it could not afford to offend and needs must cajole.

And Mr. Strangworth's heart contracted. He was feeling like a man who sees the thing he loves in danger of destruction from preventable causes, but is powerless to stay the catastrophe.

CHAPTER III

LORD TERRY DE BEACH IN HIS MORNING MOOD

1

Some of the younger members of the Land and Leisure Club suffered a tense time during the next few days. Letters of explanation, excuse, apology, and even affection flowed in on Mr. Strangworth, but he answered none of them, neither did he show himself. What was he going to do?

Mr. Harkles was appealed to, asked to use his influence, to be mediator, to do something—anything—like the good chap he was, to placate the outraged old "blitherer." And Mr. Harkles was pleased to think of himself as a "good chap," but not persuaded to show himself one immediately, by acceding to their requests. Waiting to see which way the cat jumped, he shunned the minor delinquents.

Callowabbey was advised to make it up with Filmer Dabbs, junior, in order to pump him. Filmer declared that Strangworth had gone off swearing that he'd ruin the whole rank lot of them, by Jove! for what blasted one of 'em would ever be able to show their noses in any public capacity after being expelled from the Land and Leisure Club? As most of them looked forward to being called upon to act in their own interests in some public capacity sooner or later this threat heightened their anxiety to torture.

"He hasn't the power," Callowabbey argued.

"Oh, hasn't he!" jeered Filmer. "He has a sight more power than you aristocratic owls imagine. You ask my father! My father got up against him once, and was made to pay—a thing that doesn't happen, not to my father, without his opponent has a backing there's no resisting. You ask old Polished Poll!"

"You say that again, and I'll kick you out," Callowabbey flared up.

"Oh, yes, you'll kick me out right enough," Filmer retorted, grinning, "till the next time you get yourself into a hole and can't get out of it without my help! If some of your tricks come to the ears of your amiable ma, you'll get your jam stopped, my young Earl."

"You're drunk!" Callowabbey shouted.

"Clever child!" Filmer rejoined. "That'll do for an excuse when you want me next. A drunken man doesn't know what he's saying when it's convenient to countenance him again; when it isn't convenient to countenance him, it's *in vino veritas*. If the brains of some of you were only equal to your slipperiness at a pinch, what men you'd be!"

Mr. Harkles, to his surprise, was the first to hear from Mr. Strangworth. He received a letter from that gentleman at his flat one morning, which so puzzled him that it spoilt his breakfast and drove him out in such hot haste to consult Lord Terry de Beach that he forgot to put on his stays. He supposed that the matter which intrigued him would make his appearance at an untimely hour acceptable to his patron as a titbit of interest to be discussed, therefore he set out in high feather, and enjoyed the walk under the impression that he looked as important as he felt. He had as yet had no experience of the Terrier in his early morning mood, a mood which was chronic and made him dangerous to approach, being the kind of mood which desires a victim. When Mr. Harkles sent up his card it displeased Lord Terry de Beach to be disturbed by him at a time of day when he had no use for him, therefore he decided to see him.

He received him in a room opening out of his bedroom, which he used as a dressing-room, though, crowded as it was with a miscellaneous collection of arms, curios, nudities in marble and on canvas, sporting pictures, and portraits, French novels lying ready to hand as if in immediate request, and other books of all kinds superannuated in bookcases,—it looked more like a

museum full of trophies collected to illustrate the character of the occupant. In the midst of the medley he lounged in an old leather armchair, broad, deep, and easy, and his appearance was arresting. A voluminous silk robe, girdled at the waist by a cummerbund, fell in folds to his high-arched feet, which were encased in perfumed Russia leather slippers turned up at the toes. A picturesquely becoming silk turban, such as Sikh cavalrymen wear, provided the shelter and adornment for his head which unkind nature had denied him. Robe, cummerbund, shoes and turban were of a uniform rich dark red. So attired, with the defects of his figure hidden, with his heavy white moustache bristling up towards his temples, and his shaggy eyebrows tempering the goggle of his too prominent dull grey eyes, he looked like a handsome, dangerous autocrat out of the Arabian Nights.

Mr. Harkles, who never lost sight of himself as a man of the world in the best society, would have described his own entry on the scene as "confidently debonair."

Lord Terry sat up with the impatient look of a man disturbed and resenting it, and threw the book he had been reading on the floor, where the one incongruous item of his make-up, a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez, falling off, joined it sympathetically.

Mr. Harkles decided on flattery as the best balm to apply to these symptoms of irritation. "Well!" he exclaimed, omitting the customary formalities of greeting. "You do show to admiration in that costume!"

Lord Terry signified, by rising and slowly drawing himself up, that Mr. Harkles had taken a liberty. "Good-morning, Mr. Harkles," he said stiffly, "how do you do?"

Mr. Harkles, taken aback, stammered, "Oh—good-morning," and held out his hand.

Lord Terry looked at it distastefully.

Mr. Harkles made a valiant effort to keep up his habitual air of cheerful nonchalance. "I really must apologise," he said. "The first glimpse of you in that most becoming attire killed convention. You really do show to admiration."

The Terrier resumed his seat, stuck his hands deep in the pockets of his robe, and deliberately scowled at Mr. Harkles from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"A damned affected expression," he flung at him. "What d'ye want? You can sit down."

Mr. Harkles, supposing a late carouse to excuse his patron's irascibility, brightened at this sign of relenting, and bestirred himself. "You may be sure that I have not intruded without good reason," he said, mildly reproachful, and at the same time picking up the Terrier's pince-nez and restoring them with the air of one who returns good for evil. "I am sorry to have disturbed you."

"What d'ye *want*?" the Terrier yapped again impatiently.

"I wanted to ask your advice in an emergency—in fact, to consult you in a matter which I thought might interest you. Doubtless I presume, as I have no right. But it has come as a surprise to me, and I fancy there is more in it than appears on the surface."

The Terrier began to be curious, his eyebrows relaxed. "What's the matter? Out with it, man!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Harkles handed him Mr. Strangworth's letter, then perched himself on the only available seat, the others being littered with lumber of all sorts. It was hard and high and impossible to sit upon with any sort of elegant ease, a sort of stool of repentance purposely kept clear for the inconvenience of unwelcome visitors. But Mr. Harkles, watching the Terrier as he read Mr. Strangworth's note, forgot his own discomfort in satisfaction, for the effect was immediately reassuring. At the first glance the vapours of his morning mood disappeared from the old man's countenance, apparently cleared away by an inclination to laugh—which puzzled Mr. Harkles, for what was there humorous in the composition?

Having read it to himself, Lord Terry, after an enigmatical glance at Mr. Harkles, read it aloud. "'Mr. Strangworth presents his compliments to Mr. Harkles,'" it ran, "'and requests Mr. Harkles to oblige him by dining with him at eight o'clock on the earliest date that Mr. Harkles can make it convenient to come to Strangworth House.'"

"What do you make of that?" Mr. Harkles exclaimed.

"Kind of a royal mandate," Lord Terry chuckled.

"Kind of impertinence," Mr. Harkles retorted.

"Impertinence is excusable, if not admirable, when it answers our purpose," Lord Terry replied sententiously.

"What right has Gregor Strangworth to address me with his compliments?" Mr. Harkles blustered.

"Are you on 'Gregor Strangworth' terms with the gentleman?" Lord Terry de Beach inquired.

Mr. Harkles lowered his tone. "What would you do?" he asked.

"Gad! I'd name the happy day without loss of time, and get it over. There's no escape for you."

The word "escape" suggested uncomfortable possibilities. "You think there's something up, then?" Mr. Harkles asked.

"I'm damned sure of it," was the Terrier's emphatic opinion. "Something pendin'. Or"—after a moment's pause—"*threatenin'.*"

"Threatening!" Mr. Harkles exclaimed contemptuously. "Who's Gregor Strangworth, to threaten me!"

"Who, indeed!" said Lord Terry de Beach, and again he looked amused.

"You know more about him perhaps than I do," Mr. Harkles said tentatively.

"Possibly," the Terrier replied. "I have known him for a considerable time. But why has he asked you to dine with him? Any idea?"

Mr. Harkles had an idea, and the question switched his mind back to it. "Well, there was a fracas at the hotel the other night, don't you know," he replied.

But Lord Terry did not own to knowing. "Was there? After we went home, I suppose?" he said.

"You haven't heard the details?" Mr. Harkles asked.

"Details?" Lord Terry answered evasively. "Were there details? But the details don't matter to me. That may not be the case with you, though, or with Strangworth. Where does he come in?"

"Oh, they mixed him up in it somehow," Mr. Harkles replied. "Filmer Dabbs got across them—somehow—and there was a scuffle, and Strangworth interfered, it seems, on the side of law and order, and got—er—hustled—rather badly. He's made no sign since, and the question is, what's he going to do? If he reports the shindy, it may be ruin to several of the youngsters."

"H'm," Lord Terry breathed, "Strangworth's not a man I should like to 'hustle' myself. You've not done with that 'hustlin'' yet, I should say."

"But I'd nothing to do with it," Mr. Harkles protested. "I wasn't even there."

"Perhaps you ought to have been," said Lord Terry de Beach.

Mr. Harkles had nothing to say to this, and there was a pause,

during which Lord Terry worked his eyebrows and looked Mr. Harkles up and down.

"Ever been to Strangworth's place?" he asked at last.

"No. Is it a 'place'? I can't imagine him running to anything but a little suburban villa crammed with dirty books."

"What a damned jolly clever devil you are, my Julius!" Lord Terry exclaimed. "You read a man like print."

Mr. Harkles overlooked the irony, because, when he was Lord Terry's "Julius," he was in favour. "I'm a pupil of yours, sir," he answered modestly.

Lord Terry grinned. "Let me see," he slowly began. "Strangworth had an idea of a house for himself at one time, rather a large idea. I remember him quotin' somethin' to me—I forget how it came in—talkin' large, p'raps."

"He does talk!" Mr. Harkles exclaimed feelingly.

"And talkers ain't doers, eh? But let me see, what was it?" He seemed to rack his brains, then exclaimed: "I've got it!

"I built myself a lordly pleasure-house,
Wherein at ease for aye to dwell.
I said, 'O Soul, make merry and carouse,
Dear Soul, for all is well.

That's the lines he meant to build on."

Mr. Harkles missed the soul part of the quotation, but caught the "lordly pleasure-house," and his recollection instantly furnished him with the picture of a huge, ornate, seaside hotel. "He'd be rich to carry out that idea," he said. "Perhaps he is?"

"Sounds like it, doesn't it?" said Lord Terry. "God knows! Strangworth might be next door to starvation or he might have Golconda to draw upon; either way, he'd never let you know it. You may have observed that he talks about any mortal thing under the sun but himself and his own affairs."

Mr. Harkles opposed the Golconda suggestion with: "I don't meet him much in Society."

"You wouldn't, my Julius, you wouldn't," said Lord Terry. "Yet he has been seen on the hilltops baskin' in the sun. I happen to know."

As Lord Terry himself had occasion to bask in the sun on the highest hilltops, Mr. Harkles was impressed by this apparently chance admission. Taken together with the Terrier's reserve

on the subject of Mr. Strangworth, it set Mr. Harkles on the alert, and he decided to accept the mysterious invitation. There might be something to discover or there might not; his curiosity was piqued.

"I suppose he was received once in a way when he made his big splash," he observed, putting out a provocative feeler. "That's the beginning and the end of that sort of man. He'd a title offered him, I've heard, and refused it. It takes money to keep up a title."

"A title won by merit!" Lord Terry said, looking up to the ceiling reflectively. "Did you ever realise what a big thing it is to win a title by merit, my Julius? Beyond you and me—me, at all events. Yet I have one merit, Mr. Harkles. Mine is the merit of knowing that I have no merit."

"Oh, don't say that!" Mr. Harkles exclaimed.

Lord Terry smiled derisively. "You amuse me, my Harkles!" he said.

"So it seems, sir," Mr. Harkles answered drily.

At this sign of irritation the Terrier laughed till the tears rolled down his cheeks.

Mr. Harkles had suspected all along that he was being played with. "I am at a loss to account for this—er—this——" he was beginning indignantly.

"Don't mention it," the Terrier interrupted.

"You are making a butt of me, sir," said Mr. Harkles.

"Why not?"

Mr. Harkles's resentment turned to sadness. "I—I haven't deserved it," he pleaded, rashly assuming that Lord Terry, not being in a state to remember "subsequent proceedings" at the hotel the other night, was unaware of his defection. But Lord Terry had inferred it when he learnt that it was Mr. Strangworth who had piloted him home, a fact which he had taken the trouble to elicit from his valet. Moreover, he had had a two hours' talk with Mr. Strangworth since, during which that gentleman had imparted some arresting information on the subject of the bourne towards which the downward path inevitably conducts those who persist in following it, and the perils they encounter by the way, and had succeeded in making at least a passing impression on the erratic nobleman. Therefore, when Mr. Harkles put forward pathetically the plea that he "hadn't deserved it," Lord Terry was moved to retort contemptuously: "Haven't you?"

"I have never failed in respect for you," Mr. Harkles defended himself, "for your position, and——"

"My age, eh?" Lord Terry caught him up. "You revere my venerable lordship, eh? I can trust your honest heart! You would sacrifice yourself for me any day!"

"I hope so," Mr. Harkles said. Then, catching a glimpse—possibly by thought transference—of what, as it appeared to him, Lord Terry would have felt about his desertion the other night had he known of it, and impelled by the disagreeable impression to excuse himself to himself, he added: "But sometimes a man is disappointed in himself. It is one thing to have an ideal of conduct, another thing to be always on the spot to act up to it when one is called upon. Impulses intrude—errors of judgment. But I do say this: a man should have credit for it if he means well."

Lord Terry, eyeing him cynically for some seconds, made significant play with his shaggy eyebrows. Mr. Harkles waited, fearful of the issue, but far from expecting the turn Lord Terry suddenly gave to the discussion. When he spoke again, it seemed as if the mordant mood had passed off and left him as he was wont to appear, airily inconsequent.

"You don't use the subjunctive after 'if,'" he remarked. "You have usage on your side, of course. Accordin' to Bain's 'Higher English Grammar,' usage excuses the breach of certain rules. Not that I'm any great shakes on grammar either. At our age, Mr. Harkles—and our age reminds me of an odd thing—eh, eh, wot?"

The suggestion that they were contemporaries had almost roused the worm to turn. Lord Terry's other insolences he had borne with, but even worms have a sore point that it is dangerous to tamper with, and his age was Mr. Harkles's. He half rose, but Lord Terry had not done with him yet.

"Oh, you're off? Well, I hope you'll enjoy the dinner."

"I have not decided to accept Mr. Gregor Strangworth's extraordinary invitation," Mr. Harkles replied untruthfully. "The style of it savours of—of——" Words failed him.

"O my Julius!" the Terrier exclaimed. "Pride will be your undoin'. And there are two sorts of pride: there's proper pride which don't see insults where they aren't because it don't expect to be insulted, and there's 'the pride that apes humility.'"

Mr. Harkles, making as if he had merely moved to change his position, resumed his seat. "I don't follow you," he said.

"You don't know Gregor Strangworth," the Terrier recommenced. "Jove! if Strangworth respected me as much as I respect him (confounded old bore!) I'd respect myself." He was talking for the purpose of provoking Mr. Harkles's curiosity, which would take him anywhere, the Terrier knew. Mr. Harkles must be made, without knowing it, to accept that invitation, or the best joke of the season would never come off. "Strangworth is of the Elect," Lord Terry pursued. "He is of the Elect who are for shaping life to its finest issues, a Spiritual Aristocracy, a company I admire and envy, a company from which you and I have exiled ourselves, my Julius."

Spiritual aristocracy meant nothing to Mr. Harkles, but he was ready to cringe to anything aristocratic. Col Drindon declared that he held the very word sacred, and bowed when he heard it pronounced.

"Then Mr. Strangworth belongs to our untitled aristocracy!" he exclaimed. "I never had a hint of this before."

"I noticed that you did not take our Gregor in the round," Lord Terry observed.

"A hint would have helped me," Mr. Harkles reproached him.

"It might."

"If you had favoured me with a hint——"

"You'd have been for making honey—busy bee!"

Mr. Harkles, greatly annoyed, jumped to a conclusion. Lord Terry was playing with him maliciously. His mischievous intention was to put him, Mr. Harkles, on the wrong tack, which was just like his malignant humour. For a moment Mr. Harkles's impulse was to rise and turn his back on Lord Terry de Beach forever. But, on second thoughts, his dignity did not seem to require such an extreme measure of retribution. It would be wiser, he reflected, to get himself amicably out of the house, so that when next they met it should be on their usual terms. A break in their intimacy would entail the loss to Mr. Harkles of so much that made life worth living! He was a good shot, and there were Lord Terry's moors in August, his coverts in October, his ground game in season, and every other sportsman's delight; there were his house-parties in winter, and his luxurious steam-yacht in sunny climes—when bitter winds made the English spring a trial. Also there were wily hostesses who knew how much it was to their advantage to favour the favourite of Lord Terry de Beach, especially when that favourite was Mr. Julius Harkles, who might be dangerous if offended.

His association with Lord Terry de Beach placed Mr. Harkles in a position to help forward or thwart the schemes of ambitious women. Lord Terry was a childless widower, and at no age is a widower hopeless, as a bachelor is apt to become. Many mothers in Society had their eye on him, and were ready to persuade beautiful daughters, if reluctant, that the man himself is in any case but a temporary inconvenience in matrimony, and, when old and infirm, not worth considering as a drawback to such permanent advantages as a title, jewels of extraordinary worth and beauty, and a liberal jointure. A breach with Lord Terry de Beach would in fact mean to Mr. Harkles the loss of so many good things that Mr. Harkles promptly turned upon himself for a fool to risk it. He therefore salved his wounded feelings by persuading himself that it would be unfair to take the old man seriously in his present rasping mood. No, he concluded, there was no need to sacrifice himself. If he solaced his pride by despising the Terrier in his heart, he might go on as usual.

This magnanimous decision resulted on Mr. Harkles's part in an attempt to take leave on the easy, familiar footing of their habitual intercourse. But meanwhile, the amusement which Lord Terry had been but ill-concealing since he saw Mr. Strangworth's note, had given way to gloom. There was more in Lord Terry de Beach than appeared, except at odd moments, large fertile tracts once cared for and cultivated but neglected now, and dark recesses in his being that it was dangerous to stumble upon. In his morning mood it was not unusual for him to suffer the torment of the fallen angel who regrets all that he has lost, and to look back with disgust to his earthly past and forward with horror to his eternal future in the world to come. But this state did not incline him to play the agreeable to any Harkles who chanced to be at his mercy at the time.

Mr. Harkles ignored his last jibe, and a short pause had ensued, during which he had determined upon his duty to himself, and prepared for an amiable parting. "Well, I must go," he said pleasantly, bracing himself to the effort. "I am really obliged to you. And pray excuse this early intrusion." He rose as he spoke, shook first one leg and then the other to straighten his trousers, set his arm akimbo, and smoothed his hair, then ventured: "By the way, that splendid colour you are wearing, may I ask the name?"

"Sang de bœuf," Lord Terry snapped mechanically.

The feeling that much depended on the next few minutes confused Mr. Harkles. "Ah, the colour of your family!" he said in his haste, his syntax going wrong.

"My people ain't Red Indians," Lord Terry growled.

But Mr. Harkles was equal to that. "What a wit you are!" he exclaimed, and laughed convincingly.

Now it is stimulating to have your wit proved by a laugh, and Lord Terry experienced a flash of the pleasant sensation, and relaxed. "Yes," he said reflectively. *"Sang de bœuf* is our colour, worn in honour of the ancestral scamp who founded the family, ten-sixty-six. I confess I have a weakness for it myself, and so has Col. Poor Col!" The black mood descended, and Lord Terry groaned. "He'll have lost his immortal soul too by the time he's Lord Terry de Beach. You're a great deal with him."

Mr. Harkles, pursuing the policy of pacification and rightly estimating the value of the vein he had struck so felicitously, laughed again. "Really, I must protest!" he cried. "I'm no match for you! Now, really, is it fair?"

"Not fair to Col certainly."

Mr. Harkles, not perceiving that the vein was exhausted, laughed again, a tactless effort which fell flat. Lord Terry eyed him grimly, then made an upward despairing gesture with his hands, which left his turban tilted at a rakish angle.

"Harkles," he said solemnly, starting upright in his chair. "Harkles, you're a damned fool, *damned,* sir! *For the soul that sinneth, it shall die.*"

With his turban on one side, and glaring at Mr. Harkles, he spoke like a prophet, and looked like one, of the militant Mussulman order—but an intoxicated prophet, whose sin has found him out.

Mr. Harkles stared at this, utterly taken aback. The gay *equivoque,* even when gross, Mr. Harkles enjoyed; he held that the necessary matter, wittily expressed, promoted sociability and was an essential part of the conversational equipment of men of the world; but the subject of religion seriously broached affected him unpleasantly, and therefore appeared to him to be in the worst possible taste.

Looking down now in confusion, his eye caught the volume on the floor. It was near enough for him to read the title—Holy Bible!

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die," Lord Terry repeated

mournfully. Had he been maudlin drunk, Mr. Harkles would have smiled; as it was, he saw nothing humorous in the position. He was for answering defiantly that he took no stock in that sort of thing, but thought better of it. The shock to his sense of propriety was severe and discouraging. It shook his confidence in himself, for if Lord Terry could be in earnest on the subject of religion, he was other than the simple, elementary sort of *bon viveur* Mr. Harkles had hitherto supposed himself to be dealing with. Complexity was the obstacle which oftenest baffled Mr. Harkles in his synthetic burrowings into the secrets of his acquaintances by means of the addition of two and two. Was there a morbid religious strain in Lord Terry de Beach which had heretofore escaped from the total he had arrived at in his summing of him up? He had flattered himself that he should know where he was with Lord Terry under any circumstances, but if Lord Terry, as the trend of his quotation seemed to indicate, breakfasted his mind on parts of the Bible other than those passages from which he could extract nourishment for lustful meditation, then clearly Mr. Harkles was at fault, and could never again be sure that he had fully made him out. And he must make him out, else where would he be with him? A vista of difficulties to come caused his heart to contract, but his habit of considering a man as a mixture brought reassurance. He saw Lord Terry now as distinctly two men instead of one, and, supposing that he had always been a Bible Christian in the morning and a pet of the devil at night, settled it that all he had to do to keep his place was to avoid him in the morning.

"I don't know if you ever had a soul, Mr. Harkles," Lord Terry pursued, frowning at him. "I had. Mine showed signs of growth at one time, but it suffered from starvation, and now my one hope is that it has become extinct. Annihilation has no terrors for me, but if I am to survive to all eternity, I'm damned if I like the prospect. Have you ever faced the prospect of getting your deserts in the world to come, Mr. Harkles? The prospect of eternal life in hell-fire?"

"I don't believe in hell-fire," Mr. Harkles said hastily.

"That settles it, eh?" Lord Terry jeered. "It's amusin' to hear people flatterin' themselves that they can dispose of their souls as they like by refusin' to believe that anything contrary to their taste can happen to them. Friend Harkles, your tailor helped you into Society, and is keepin' you there; but don't depend upon him to get you into heaven." He bit his nails,

and enjoyed for a little the thought of Mr. Harkles in the other place, accompanied by his tailor.

The lackey in Mr. Harkles obstinately counselled submission to Lord Terry's lash, and he watched him now for a parting sign of favour, as a dog for a biscuit—a vindictive dog that would have bitten him had he dared, but feared both the lash and the loss of the biscuit. Mr. Harkles was of the cur kind which is not grateful for past favours; his attachments were prolonged in the hope and on the chance of favours to come, as appeared when he deserted an old friend for a new one, with more to offer him. But he was still by way of getting himself out of the room on a note which should leave a pleasant impression. "Well, thank you," he said. "I'm no better than I should be, Lord knows, though no worse than other men, I protest. Still, a word in season kindly meant——"

"Oh, go to the devil, confound you!" Lord Terry interrupted. "You're wastin' my time. Touch that bell, will you! Thank you. Good-mornin'. Hi! Here a minute! Damn it, come back! . . . Pick up my Bible. That's it. Now go to hell!"

2

It was not Harkles the complacent who walked away from Terry de Beach House, it was Harkles in a rage—Harkles Superbus the Haughty, a man of means and position, the pet of Society, intimate with the peerage, envied by his equals, a wonder and a mystery to the baser sort—Harkles, in a word, as he habitually saw himself. But rage only seized upon him after he meekly rang the bell when bidden, after he took his dismissal as if the manner of it had been complimentary, after he was called back and ordered to pick up the Book, and had obeyed with smiling alacrity like an obliging lackey, after the street-door was shut upon him with a bang. But then, suddenly, rage so thoroughly overcame him that he made a vulgar gesture. He,

> *The glass of fashion, and the mould of form,*
> *The observed of all observers!*

And even this was not enough. He went further—in the literal sense, striding rapidly with his head down; in the moral sense, rising to violence. He threatened Lord Terry de Beach. With

his umbrella he threatened him—that gentlemanly umbrella which had never been in any society but the best. It had even been presented at Court at a garden-party on a cloudy day. It was only taken out on cloudy days, as an appropriate finish to a perfect *ensemble*. And it had never been opened since it left the professional fingers which only can turn out an umbrella rolled as it should be rolled. Rather than endanger its elegance by opening it, Mr. Harkles would at any time take a cab, and he was not extravagant in cab fares—when it came to paying the cabman. Oh, you don't know what Harkles Superbus was in a rage! To be avenged on an Insulter, he would stop at nothing —so long as they were not face to face.

The Terrier had been playing upon him, "drawing" him, insulting him; "coming it" Lord Terry de Beach over the landless Julius Harkles, of 74, Eligible Flats Mansions for single gentlemen,—and that was a nice thing to do after all these years! It wasn't as if Mr. Harkles had ever presumed, or was presuming, considering their intimacy, in seeking his counsel. What was the meaning of it? Could it be the earliness of the hour? But that was no excuse! The Terrier might have denied himself. No gentleman would have received Mr. Harkles simply for the purpose of lashing him with his tongue, of punishing him venomously, for venturing to disturb him,—a venial offence, an error of judgment at the worst; but a compliment under the circumstances, in that it was a proof of confidence and respect, —*ergo*, Lord Terry de Beach was no gentleman, with all his acres!—Were acres the test of a man! Say what you like, Mr. Harkles was a power in Society. It was Mr. Harkles who invented the Excelsior Sock Suspender, patronised by the nobility and gentry. It was Mr. Harkles who introduced the Par Excellence Morning Coat, and made the fortune of a pair of breeches by allowing them to be called The Harkles. Could Lord Terry de Beach have done as much, with all his acres? Had fashion ever dreamed of allowing itself to be set by Lord Terry de Beach?—Mr. Harkles, catching a glimpse of his elegant self in a plate-glass window as he passed, slowed down to enjoy the moving picture; and there flashed into his mind that something stimulating said by somebody about being the mirror of form and the glass of fashion. Would he, with every advantage of person and charm of manner, change places with a spindle-shanked, old, decayed object like Terry de Beach? No, he would not—with all his acres. Mr. Harkles decided that he

would not, with as much *hauteur* as if Lord Terry de Beach had been there on his knees to be retaliated upon in the act of offering him the option.

All the same, when next they were seen together, which was within a week, Lord Terry de Beach was hanging on Mr. Harkles's arm, making a walking-stick of him as usual. And Mr. Harkles wore the complacent smile with which he was wont to betray his sense of the honour done him.

CHAPTER IV

MR. STRANGWORTH AT HOME

1

As Mr. Harkles dressed for the dinner with Mr. Strangworth he could not make up his mind as to whether he was arming for the fray, adorning a lamb for the sacrifice (of a precious evening to an intolerable bore), or in for something quite unimaginable. He went by train to the outlandish district that was just the sort of place in which you would expect to find that an outsider like Strangworth lived. His intention was to cab it to the house, but there were no cabs at the small station, so he found himself obliged to walk—in his evening-shoes, too. The road took him up a steep hill out into the country, where, for some little distance, there were no houses. The first he came to, a suburban sort of place in a few-acre garden eccentrically punctuated with arbours, looked like the old bore, he thought, but he was mistaken. A handsome little dark, bright-eyed old lady, uncommonly tastefully dressed, whom he met in the drive, directed him to a lodge higher up the road. "That is Strangworth Park," she added, indicating what was evidently a considerable demesne, on which her garden abutted.

"Humph!" thought Harkles Superior with a catch in his breath. The unexpected extent of the demesne sapped his confidence. There might be other surprises in store for him, not necessarily pleasant.

The midsummer sun had set, but the afterglow still lingered in gorgeous tints mellowing from rich crimson on the horizon to pale gold at the zenith. Against this lovely background the grey boles of the splendid forest trees which were plentifully

sprinkled about the park stood out picturesquely. But it was not a picture to please Mr. Harkles. The colour affected him as ominous. The flaming radiance brought hell-fire to mind, and Lord Terry de Beach.

The avenue was long, and for some distance no house was to be seen, but with the thought of Lord Terry, the recollection recurred of his suggestion of the place as a "lordly pleasure-house," and his own conception of it as a kind of big fiorid hotel. Had Lord Terry been humbugging him altogether? Well, not altogether, for this must be Strangworth House, and Strangworth House, with its fine approach, was evidently the property of a gentleman of considerable means. The apple-pie order of the extensive grounds and gardens, of which Mr. Harkles saw enough in passing to be able to judge, vouched for the means. "Essentially a gentleman's place," Mr. Harkles repeated to himself several times; and his mind misgave him afresh. What was the joke the Terrier was keeping to himself? Something malicious, or his enjoyment of it would not have been so keen. Mr. Harkles became nervous and had half a mind to turn back. Scapegoat! The unimaginable suddenly resolved itself into that. But no, that was absurd! How could he—Harkles—innocent as he was of participation in the matter, be made to suffer for the sin of those half-drunk, harum-scarum young men? The injustice of it! Impossible! But was it impossible because unjust? The scapegoat was also innocent, the flower of the flock (Mr. Harkles felt that this aptly applied to himself)—was the scapegoat justly treated?

Mr. Harkles was again moved to turn back, but he was at the hall-door, which was opened, and he found himself confronted by two muscular menservants before he could decide whether to ring or to fly.

On the outside the house looked like a fine-old-English-gentleman sort of residence, built of mellow red brick, and of no particular period. It did not stand "four square," neither was it E for Elizabeth. People approaching it for the first time used admiringly to hazard "Jacobean," "Queen Anne," or "Georgian," whichever occurred to them first, when they did not know one from the other,—that sort of house; just the place for a big family of jolly, healthy, happy children to grow up in and to return to from time to time, as to an anchorage, to have their hearts warmed and their faith in mankind renewed; just the place in which to find two married lovers grown old to-

gether, who, having fulfilled their whole duty towards God and man, standing bravely by each other in good times and bad, giving generously of the overflow of their own abounding love and receiving in return the blessing of love from children and friends, were now tranquilly awaiting the inevitable call to arise and go up higher,—their one regret the parting from their dearest, their one concern for themselves that Infinite Mercy might grant them the last silent prayer of their hearts, that they might go together.

But the stillness about the place this evening seemed unnatural, ominous. Like a sigh the sunset blaze was over, and the twilight suddenly falling, a melancholy grey veil, shrouded the scene with solemn import. Certainly the approach promised Mr. Harkles no pleasure in store; it might have been a funeral to which he was bidden. And that sudden opening of the door, happening as it did just in time to check his impulse to fly, was not reassuring. The stalwart menservants suggested agents lying in wait to accomplish a criminal purpose, rather than watchers set ready to offer a hospitable welcome.

The entrance hall was in keeping with the ample exterior of the house. In so far as it was national at all, it was English, but it was not the English of any particular period. Its distinction was the healthy human distinction of long continuance, which gives expression to the healthy human desire for substantial comfort regardless of historical accuracy though not of beauty, an ideal not quick or easy of attainment, and only to be reached by cultivated taste controlled by an intelligent adaptation of means to the combined end, comfort with beauty. There was the restful beauty of colour, form, association, and usefulness in the handsome dark oak furniture covered with crimson morocco leather, evidently long in use but not shabby; in the rich unobtrusively coloured Turkey carpets; in the obviously good, well-painted portraits of several generations of attractive people, which hung on the walls. Even the menservants who relieved Mr. Harkles of his overcoat and hat, harmonised with the general effect, in that they were a handsome, reliable-looking pair, of the kind which add considerably to the comfort of life. Their immediate care for Mr. Harkles saved him from a disaster which would have embittered the rest of his life. In his perturbation he forgot that he had turned up his trousers for the walk, and, but for the presence of mind of one of the servants, who thoughtfully turned them down for him, where would

the reputation of the one man who never made a mistake in dress have been? But even this escape did not reassure him. The attentions of the servants somehow brought to mind the last solemn toilet of a man whom decent jailors are preparing for execution.

He was conducted up a few broad, shallow steps at the end of the hall and along a gallery, to the library, where it would have seemed to a book-lover that the general appearance of substantial comfort culminated in luxury. Mr. Harkles was not a book-lover, but the luxury appealed to him.

Mr. Strangworth, with his back to the high-carved mantelpiece, stood waiting to receive his guest, and, once face to face with him, Mr. Harkles, the debonair, was himself again. As they shook hands (for the first time in their lives) he remarked, with the ease of a man sure of his welcome wherever he goes: "Really, very good of you to give me a glimpse of your charming place!"

This should have been Mr. Strangworth's cue for "Delighted, I'm sure. The first glimpse, but I hope not the last by many." But Mr. Strangworth did not take his cue. Instead, he quenched Mr. Harkles's cordiality with a formal "How d'you do?"

The same old blunderbore, yet somehow not the same. There was a shade of some indefinable difference. But, then, you must expect to find a man in his own house somewhat different from the same man at a club, especially at the Land and Leisure Club, and when the man has only the kind of name without rank which Mr. Strangworth had made for himself. A man who was nobody worth mentioning there must, of course, in his own house as host, feel himself somebody for the time being. That he did feel so came out in his voice as well as in his manner. It was the same voice—yet with a curious difference. The didactic note was missing, and only the gentlemanly quality remained. Mr. Harkles detected the tone of a man sure of himself and of his position, a man accustomed to respect and able to exact it when he chose.

The tailor who turned out Mr. Harkles could not have looked at him in his evening-dress without emotion, so perfect was it in every detail, and so consummately put on and carried off. Mr. Strangworth's tailor would not have had the same gratification, but there were others to compensate. Although not strikingly tailor-made like the elegant Harkles, at least he dressed like a man accustomed to the right thing and the best

of its kind. A big, strong, plain, virile man, Mr. Strangworth had not even a bowing acquaintance with vanity and self-consciousness, and women turned to him instinctively with confidence and respect, as to all of his kind. Mr. Harkles, on the other hand, though a sizeable and handsome man, betrayed in many little finnicking ways, when off his guard, those feminine weaknesses which result in staylaces. There were women who, admiring good grooming, let him count for a man, but there were more who detected his effeminacy and treated him like one of themselves. These, to each other in private, said he was "duckie," and laughed, and called him Julius Caesar, to commemorate the conquests he had not made.

Whether Mr. Strangworth intended it or not, his greeting to Mr. Harkles did not flatter that gentleman's self-conceit. Having spoken, he gave Mr. Harkles a comprehensive glance, and looked down, as if he had discovered some flaw in him. Mr. Harkles uneasily questioned himself. Could it be *powder*? To have had powder show would have been intolerably crude. It was a fearful suspicion, and not a mirror in the room—nothing but beastly books and busts and pictures. Surreptitiously, he dusted his face with his handkerchief, but even then, how could he be sure?

He had not been ten minutes in the house, yet it already seemed an age. And he cursed Lord Terry de Beach and his mysterious hints. Left to himself, he would have expected something eccentric and even uncouth; would have been surprised at the scale on which the unpretentious gentleman was established—but, except for Lord Terry, he would have been satisfied by this time that the only peculiarity about Mr. Strangworth at home was that there was no peculiarity at all.

"Close evening," Mr. Strangworth observed, doubtless *à propos* to the face-dusting. "There's a storm threatening. Those blazing sunsets are ominous when they are the colour of blood. I don't know if you noticed the sunset."

"I did," said Mr. Harkles; "very threatening;" and again he thought of hell-fire, but he also thought of that big florid hotel of his fancy, and pushed out the one thought by acting on the other.

"You did not build this place yourself," he observed.

"That strikes you?" said Mr. Strangworth, and glanced round indifferently.

Mr. Harkles inwardly wondered did he buy it, inherit it, or

was it a gift? And Mr. Strangworth, as if in answer to the question, pursued: "No, I did not build the house. There have been Strangworths here for some few hundred years."

"So I should have thought," Mr. Harkles assured him, and was satisfied that he had said the right thing this time.

Dinner was immediately announced; so evidently he was to be the only guest. "I'm in for it," Mr. Harkles thought, whatever *it* might be. Something pleasantly appetising it seemed to his experienced eye as he viewed the admirable dining-room and the bountiful promise of the table. Three menservants in waiting and obviously of the household; there is no mistaking the greengrocer for the real thing. By Jove! if the *chef* were in keeping with everything else in this establishment, old Strangworth did himself well!—Mr. Harkles hurriedly revised his opinion of Mr. Strangworth from the beginning of their acquaintance. Strangworth clearly was a man to be respected.

It was still broad daylight, and the view from the open windows must ordinarily have been delightful, but this evening being sombre, the aspect was not enlivening. Nature, in an unfriendly mood, deserves to be slighted, as Mr. Strangworth intimated by an order given casually as they took their seats: "Shut out the cold grey."

The order was apparently addressed to his plate, but evidently he was understanded of his people however eccentrically he expressed himself, and commanded that prompt service which means that a master is either a brute to be feared or a human being well-beloved. Simultaneously curtains were drawn and cunningly shaded lights turned on, beneath the soft radiance of which the table decorations gleamed resplendent—but not expensively resplendent. There were no prices marked on anything in that house, so to speak. Given the possession of taste, with the means to gratify it, and Mr. Harkles felt blessed in an acquaintance; therefore his heart expanded in Mr. Strangworth's clover field, and he determined that, even if Mr. Strangworth had not invited him simply for the pleasure of his company, he would, as he believed he could, make himself so agreeable that old Gregor would be fain to acknowledge appreciatively that he had been entertaining an angel unawares. But, alas! how many of our good intentions are thwarted by the obtuseness of those who, giving us no credit for them, do not play up to them. From the first Mr. Harkles's attention was diverted from his object, when it was not absolutely baulked. To begin

with, instead of the succulent oyster which, when in season, makes the mouth of the expectant guest to water, and instead of the various *hors d'œuvres* which should offer a stimulating choice to the appetite, there lay on his plate a curious fruit like an orange half peeled, but with milk-white segments in a dark claret-coloured cup rimmed with a paler shade, and formed by the leathery rind—at which Mr. Harkles committed the deplorable solecism of looking suspiciously.

"'Malaya's nectared mangosteen,'" Mr. Strangworth quoted sententiously.

"Oh, indeed! A delicacy then!" Mr. Harkles, relieved, inferred a compliment to himself, as a guest must when an exotic delicacy is added to the conventional menu for his entertainment. Unfortunately his exclamation confirmed the doubt previously displayed in his suspicious eye. "The first I have seen," he pursued, hastily trying to cover the lapse. "I always understood that they would not carry so far."

"They do not, in sufficient number to make it worth while to import them. These are among the very few survivors from a whole cargo."

The familiar didactic note sounding in this, revived Mr. Harkles's assurance, and in order to show that he, too, was a cultivated man and quite at his ease, he stretched out his hand to a sugar-basin in front of him, and at the same time confidently misquoted:

"Every black will have his white
And every sour his sweet."

But Mr. Strangworth restrained his hand with a for-Heaven's-sake-don't sort of gesture which caused Mr. Harkles to drop the sugar-spoon like a thief caught in the act.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, and, imitating Mr. Strangworth, emptied the mangosteen out of its rind with a fork, and bravely tasted. The first taste caused him to beam at Mr. Strangworth as at a benefactor of his species. "Delicious!" he murmured, and ate the rest in reverent silence.

A mushroom in apotheosis followed. It was so perfect in appearance that Mr. Harkles feared for a moment it was an insult in chocolate, but again, having tasted, his enjoyment was too intense to admit of more than the murmured repetition of the one word, "Delicious!"

Then followed a little bird, served with salad—and such a bird! So inviting to the eye, and warm and tender and juicy and sweet to the palate! Mr. Harkles's longing eyes furtively asked another of the servants, but they hardened their hearts, and took no notice. It was so all through dinner; but one delicious morsel of everything; only enough to whet the appetite.

The next *plat* was a sweet, but Mr. Harkles baulked at it. Sweets are dangerous to the figure, also rheumatic. He had the happy thought of excusing himself with a quotation he had heard Col Drindon make telling play with for another purpose:

"He that fights and runs away
May live to fight another day,
For those that fly may fight again,
Which he can never do that's slain."

Mr. Harkles glowed with self-satisfaction after this effort. His aptitude surprised him; also it inclined his heart towards Mr. Strangworth. After all, can there be better company than his who draws out the best that is in you?

But Mr. Strangworth, the blundering ass, gave his intelligent guest no time to expand. On the instant, with slow and thoughtful enunciation, he riposted:

"And a rhyme in season
May pass for a reason."

The application was obscure to Mr. Harkles's immediate apprehension, but his self-satisfaction was chagrined, and afterwards he saw why. In fact, it was only afterwards that he saw most of what Mr. Strangworth was driving at. But then it became apparent to him that one of Mr. Strangworth's diversions was to be cryptic; to plant a phrase in the mind which, acting like the sting of a mosquito, was not felt at the moment but gave you fits at regularly recurring times later on.

"The sweet is necessary," Mr. Strangworth proceeded, "or you will not appreciate the next course. The rotation of the courses is so ordered that one dish deserves another. Refuse one, and you spoil the continuity. Dining is a great art, very imperfectly understood as a rule. The *plats* should not be episodical in effect, but homogeneous."

Mr. Harkles, deprived of the power of resistance by this

bewildering explanation, fell to helplessly, and devoured the sweet.

Fish followed. Mr. Strangworth beamed at Harkles: "Now, you see why the sweet," he said. "The Japanese eat sugar with fish. That gave me the tip. Properly studied, each nation has some idea or discovery of its own in the matter of food, which, when intelligently adapted to our tastes, may contribute its quota to the pleasures of the table. I tried sugar with fish and did not care for it. Then I tried a sweet before the fish, and made my discovery. How do you find it?"

"Excellent," said Mr. Harkles, "given such a sweet followed by such fish."

But the combination made him anxious to prepare himself for what might follow, and, as he spoke, he peered among the table decorations, evidently in search of something.

"I never have a menu," Mr. Strangworth said, divining his want. "The surprises of life do us good, and dinner should always be a surprise. Pleasure obviously has a large part to play in the magnificent scheme of the universe. The Almighty mercifully gave us the kindly fruits of the earth so as in due time we might enjoy them."

"Then, if it is not impertinent to ask, are you always served in this——" Mr. Harkles would like to have said "disorder," but hesitated.

"In this way?" Mr. Strangworth caught him up. "There is an addition to the number of dishes when I am entertaining my friends,—I make that difference. I agree with Dr. Johnson that a guest should be honoured with some slight addition to the inevitable boiled mutton and trimmings. Let us enjoy! Take that for your motto at meals, and the rest follows automatically. Have you ever considered the meaning of the verb 'to divert,' and followed it out to its logical conclusion? If you have, you must see the asinine stupidity of the conventional arrangement of dinners. What is more stultifying to the sense of pleasure than monotony? What more monotonous than a dinner every night of so many courses served eternally in the same order? No wonder that dulness is the invariable concomitant of dining domestically. When you talk about good living, it is good eating you mean. In that sense, as a man eats, so he is. Diversion connotes diversity—d'you see? Heavens! the way in which you can make things amusing for yourself! If you've never tried, you'd be astonished!"

A dainty slice off a saddle of Welsh mutton, served with currant jelly and dry toast and followed by *petits pois comme légumes,* were the next diversion.

"Think of potatoes!" Mr. Strangworth continued.

"I don't like to think of potatoes," Mr. Harkles interrupted plaintively. "They are said to be—er—fattening." He felt so strongly on this subject that he shrank even from pronouncing the word. "Do you eat potatoes?" he ventured to ask.

"Eat them? I should think so! Why, when I am alone, and have potatoes, I eat nothing else. Potatoes and buttermilk—here's to old Ireland!" He raised his glass, and drank.

"Here's to old Ireland!" Mr. Harkles followed suit with what enthusiasm he could summon at a moment's notice.

"But there you are again!" Mr. Strangworth exclaimed. "In most houses it is boiled potatoes forever, and badly boiled potatoes at that! Why, sir, you make a staple of the potato as a vegetable and don't in your dulness know how to cook it, even in one way, so as to make it fit for human food. And there are a dozen different ways of cooking potatoes. Sir, I solemnly assure you, I have been so perverted by the monotony of badly boiled potatoes in certain houses, that I felt that if I ever saw a potato again I should insult it."

The indignant glance he shot at Mr. Harkles as he spoke, made Mr. Harkles, in the confusion of mind to which he was rapidly being reduced, feel as if he were being accused of being a badly boiled potato.

"What next, Appledore?" Mr. Strangworth went on, addressing his butler presumably, though he looked away from him.

"An *intermezzo,* if you please, sir."

"*Good!*" Mr. Strangworth ejaculated.

The *intermezzo* was an ice, with which cigarettes and liqueurs were offered. Mr. Harkles took one of each for better for worse. Mr. Strangworth approved.

"You see why *intermezzo?*" he asked, and answered himself: "To vary the monotony."

Appledore bent beside Mr. Harkles and asked him, in a pleasant conversational tone, "What music do you like, sir?"

If Harkles Superbus had damned his impudence he might have been excused, for no butler had ever before ventured to ask him what music he liked. He was too flabbergasted, however, to do anything but respond. "Oh—something lively—

Brahms," he stammered, uttering the only name that occurred to him. The incident so put him off his balance that he found himself unjustly accusing the ice of having touched the nerve of one of his false teeth.

Mr. Strangworth was lighting his cigarette. "I am glad you like Brahms," he said. "I'm just in the mood for Brahms myself. Music, heavenly maid, is no longer allowed to be young and spontaneous. You'll find a good deal of her nowadays is plausible make-up. She has fallen into bad company, and is being faked with mind, memory, learning, what-not—as if she were an intellectual achievement. Music is not an intellectual achievement. She is pure Spirit, and the Capturer, not the captured. You know it, too, when every now and then she lifts one of these composer-mechanicians clear out of his own brain-pan and carries him away for a bar or two. But she can't keep him up. He is too heavily weighted by his self-conceit, and drops down again to the sound-and-fury-signifying-nothing level of art without inspiration. Music to make you think, good Lord! *'I* pant for the music that is divine.' Uplifting! I am off on wings to glory while the music I delight in lasts. I never hear a note of it."

With his eyes on the curtains which draped an archway at the end of the room, and a beatific expression of expectation on his face, he raised his hand to bespeak silence. And on the instant there was a burst of music—a sextette of stringed instruments, finely handled. Mr. Strangworth kept time for a few bars, with head and hand, then he rose from the table.

"I take a little exercise to the music," he said, speaking in a reverent undertone. "It is highly beneficial as a preparation for the next effort."

Having spoken, he began to pace up and down the long room, alternately smoking his cigarette and waving it, as though he were conducting the music in an ecstasy of appreciation.

It flashed into Mr. Harkles's mind that he was being entertained by a lunatic, and lunatics become dangerous if they are not humoured. The suspicion brought him to his feet, and set him solemnly pacing up and down on the other side of the room, with a creditable assumption of his host's expression of delighted absorption; but as they passed each other, he stole a furtive glance at Mr. Strangworth out of the corner of his eye, and was pretty sure that Mr. Strangworth also kept his eye on him.

Was this then the explanation of the Terrier's suppressed amusement at the thought of their dining together *tête-à-tête*? Did he know that Mr. Harkles was coming out to a private asylum to dine with a madman and be waited on by three keepers? It was like his blasted sense of humour to see anything funny in such a position! Mr. Harkles quickened his pace. His sense of dignity was compromised by the compulsion he dared not resist; playing the idiot in a ridiculous farce kept under all perception of anything humorous in the position. Another man might have made capital for laughter out of it; not so Mr. Harkles. To him the unprecedented was always improper; and, conversely, precedent excused many things which ethically cannot be countenanced. Doubt of what was to follow distracted his mind with the question: What sort of "effort" was it for which he was warned to prepare? The uncertainty was so tormenting that the only way to endure it was to resign himself. But how he wished that he had turned back on the doorstep! Not a note of the music did he hear to begin with; but the piece was long and lovely, and insensibly its charm began to work. He liked music; he found himself listening; his pace slackened; the tension was released. He no longer believed his host to be insane.

As the music concluded Mr. Strangworth returned to his place, and stood by the table, shaking his own hands. "What do you think of that, Harkles? What do you think of that?" he repeated several times, in a voice husky with emotion.

Again Mr. Harkles surprised himself. Without a moment's preparation, he rejoined: "The music of the spheres!" He did not know whether this was his own original poetry or a quotation, but anyway, how apt! And again he experienced the thrill of intellectual achievement, which is like nothing else in the world; and again he generously gave his host the credit of drawing a man out at his best. Then he sat down, and found himself confronted by "the next effort."

"The next effort" was boiled potato.

A big, boiled, floury potato, bursting out of its skin. One footman stood at Mr. Harkles's elbow, the other at Mr. Strangworth's, and each held a plate on a salver. Mr. Strangworth, with a beaming countenance, was peeling his potato, and there could be no doubt that Harkles Superbus was not only required to eat his potato but must peel it too, under the eye of those flunkies, and deposit the skin on that plate. He did it, and also

took butter when it was offered him—in for a penny in for a pound. But having ventured to taste he unhesitatingly declared that if all potatoes were like this one, he could live upon potatoes.

"Didn't I tell you!" cried Mr. Strangworth, delighted. "I have devoted time and thought to the cultivation of these potatoes, and I have them served in their skins because only the man who eats a potato can be trusted to peel it. My man is a man of the best intentions, but he is not clear on the subject of the importance of preserving that white line under the skin of a potato. Cut off that white line under the skin, and what do you get? You get indigestion, sir! Bountiful nature provides the potato with the substance in the exact proportion requisite to make it digestible, and places the substance in a conspicuous position, and what does your ass of a cook do? Cuts it off!"

"Really, how interesting!" Mr. Harkles observed.

"And really how important," said Mr. Strangworth. "Food is the most important subject in the world."

"The French have mastered it," Mr. Harkles believed.

"There are good cooks in France," Mr. Strangworth allowed. "But there is only one sound principle to be followed in preparing food for the table, which is, that everything should be served on its own merits. If a thing cannot be enjoyed for its own special flavour, it is not fit for human food. Therefore, the sole condiments allowable are pepper and salt, and these should only be trusted to a cook who has the art to use just enough for the required purpose."

"Quite so. And you dine upon principle? The ice *intermezzo* now—with music. A happy thought, the music. How did you arrive at it?"

"You will have observed that the conversation always flags after the ice," Mr. Strangworth replied, "which clearly indicates that then is the time for music. When music is introduced all through dinner, as it is at those dreadful restaurant places, it is an irritating interruption to the talk, and quite as indigestible as the food. As I have it, it is rest and refreshment, and you enjoy it."

"You had excellent musicians to-night," said Mr. Harkles. "Where did you get them?"

"Oh, I brought them over with me when I returned from America last time," Mr. Strangworth answered casually. "Hun-

garians. I found them starving in the street—out of employment."

"Then—er—are they of your household?" Mr. Harkles asked.

It appeared that they were, and Mr. Harkles was much impressed. The *chef,* the musicians, the whole scale on which the establishment was run meant means, and means make a man worth knowing. Mr. Harkles at this moment saw a flattering excuse for the potato. The potato was the kind of amiable practical joke one man plays off on another whom he likes; the satisfactory corollary to which was that Strangworth liked Harkles. Mr. Harkles enjoyed the feeling of being liked by a man of means. He fancied himself saying off-hand to this one and that: "My friend Strangworth, you know. Such a good chap! A bit eccentric, of course, but spends his millions like a gentleman, I assure you. And I ought to know, seeing so much of him as I do."

The wine was having a benign effect. Mr. Harkles had not exceeded, but he had taken enough to make him an optimist. And what with that and the pleasant prospect of good things to come, he was ready to hold out the right hand of friendship to Mr. Strangworth upon the slightest encouragement. He was so buoyed up by this flight of fancy that he disposed of savoury, cheese, and *chaud-froid,* and would have wound up the serious part of the dinner with soup, as a matter of course, if Mr. Strangworth had not directed his attention to its peculiar place at the end, instead of the beginning, of the feast. Mr. Strangworth accounted for this divergence from a bad custom by calling it "commonsense." "Beginning dinner with soup dilutes the gastric juices," he said, "and if the gastric juice is diluted it stands to reason that it will not be strong enough to dissolve the solids with which it has afterwards to deal. Hence again dyspepsia."

To make sure of the *chef,* Mr. Harkles ventured to ask if Mr. Strangworth ran his household entirely with men.

"Oh, no," Mr. Strangworth answered casually. "I have a handful of women. I like to see them about."

Mr. Harkles smiled discreetly. The quarter from which this wind seemed to blow was one that suited him.

Dessert on the table, Mr. Strangworth said: "I drink a toast here. It is the custom of the house."

Mr. Harkles was happy to conform to any custom of such a house, and rising in imitation of his host, he held his glass aloft

in smiling expectation of "The Ladies!" or at least "The Queen, God bless her!"

Behind him, standing at the sideboard between the two footmen, the butler had poured out three bumpers of port wine, one of which he took himself, the footmen doing likewise. Then all three faced about, and waited, glass in hand, their eyes on their master. With bent head, and speaking solemnly, he gave the toast, "The poor, God help them."

"The poor, Gawd 'elp 'em!" the servants echoed, their voices ringing as one.

Mr. Harkles, startled, looked round in time to see the three in a row with heads thrown back draining their glasses. "The poor, God bless them," he muttered, drank, and sat down, chilled to the bone. But he had no time to indulge his nerves, for Mr. Strangworth was under weigh again immediately.

"For the poor always ye have with you," he said, and sighed.

Mr. Harkles blamed the poor. "They are so improvident," he observed.

"The destruction of the poor is their poverty," Mr. Strangworth replied.

"What are we to do?" Mr. Harkles asked. "We are to have them always with us."

"That was not implied," Mr. Strangworth rejoined positively. "Read in the right spirit, that passage must be taken as a reproach."

"It is not in the power of one man to do much for his fellow-creatures." Mr. Harkles spoke as if he spent his whole life in doing all he could.

"There you are wrong, if you'll pardon my bluntness. The poorest and weakest can do vast things for their fellow-creatures. They can pray for them.

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of.

The poor, Harkles, the poor! Do you ever think of the awful needless sufferings of the poor?"

Harkles defended himself against the discomfort of such talk. "I hear of distress," he said, "but I cannot say that I have ever seen any of it. These reports are always greatly exaggerated. Also we must remember that use is second nature. The poor do not suffer as we should in their circumstances."

"Cold and starvation to them are like warmth and food to us, eh?"

"Well, not that exactly," Harkles acknowledged. "But they bring that kind of thing on themselves by their own improvidence, and are not to be pitied. A man with no regular income is bound to suffer if he does not save. They're happy enough, too, only let them alone."

"I'll never believe any man is happy who has to scratch all night," Mr. Strangworth replied, then remembered his duty as host.

"Try a peach, Mr. Harkles, or a slice of pineapple," he said. "They are both doing well with us this year."

Mr. Harkles revived. "You grow them yourself, then!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, we grow them. And the grapes, too. Everything on the table, in fact," Mr. Strangworth answered absently. The servants had withdrawn, and it was time to get to business.

Unconscious of his doom, Mr. Harkles played with a peach, very much at his ease. "There's a comfortable little place on the edge of your park," he said, "and a garden punctuated with summer-houses; who lives there?"

"Bosc."

"What—Affable Bosc?"

"Bosc—yes. A man in a thousand."

"Oh, really! And that nice little elderly person—not his wife, surely?"

"If you are speaking of a lady, you probably mean his mother."

"His mother—yes—more likely. So Affable Bosc is tied to a mother's apron-strings! Well, I presume——" Mr. Harkles was about to presume superciliously, but Mr. Strangworth, beaming on him as on a man who has told the truth for once and deserves the credit, interrupted him: "You do."

Mr. Harkles suddenly choked. Mr. Strangworth advised him to drink, and at the same time imparted some encyclopedic information on the subject of choking—curious superstitions connected therewith and remedies used therefore—and so steered the conversation off the menacing rocks upon which Mr. Harkles's presumption had threatened to wreck it. He came out of his choking-fit like a man who has had an operation for blindness which has partially cleared his sight but not quite; his had been too long diseased for anything but a gradual cure, and

he only saw enough to know that he must walk warily when Mr. Strangworth's friends were in question.

In order to escape from the encyclopedic downpour, he caught at the first question that came into his mind without foreseeing whither it might lead, and unconsciously gave his entertainer the opening for which he was lying in wait. "Been to the Club lately?" he asked.

"Not, as you know, since the night you forgot when you asked that question," Mr. Strangworth answered.

Mr. Harkles ignored the reflection on his candour.

"Ah, that night!" he sighed, as if the recollection of the depravity he had witnessed on that occasion pained him.

"Young rascals!" Mr. Strangworth exclaimed, and burst into a roar of laughter. "Young rascals! but not a bad sort, most of 'em," and he laughed again.

To Mr. Harkles, of all the unexpectedness of this most unexpected evening, Mr. Strangworth's laughter was the most surprising. He had never observed Strangworth's eyes. Kindly eyes they were always, and also eyes that could smile —just the sort of eyes that match with a jolly good-natured laugh.

Mr. Harkles thought afterwards that he would have done well to have joined in this laugh, but at the time his presence of mind forsook him, and not knowing what to think or do or say, he just sat still and stared.

"The way they ran me along that passage, Harkles," Mr. Strangworth gasped. "I tell you, I never laughed so much in my life. 'Great Scott,' indeed! Impudent young rascals!"

"'Great Scott'!" Mr. Harkles repeated the words aloud in his astonishment and dismay. The latter was portrayed on his countenance. That Strangworth should know his nickname was another shock.

"Surprised that I know what you call me?" Mr. Strangworth asked, still bubbling over with amusement. "Easy enough to arrive at, noting the repetition of the expletive in varying tones —warnings of approach, despairing dread of interruption, of gratuitous information to be imparted, and so on—and, of course, reasoning by induction. B. S., Brandy-and-Soda; C. D., Seedy. Quite easy to arrive at G. S., Great Scott—eh?"

Mr. Harkles was speechless. Resentment of a personal indignity he could have understood and would have respected, but to treat disrespect as a joke! No! that was beyond him. His

sense of propriety suffered severely. But he had to say something.

"Oh—that is the way you take it!" he faltered at last. "They will be greatly relieved to hear it. They were afraid you might think they knew it was you."

"Of course they knew it was me! That's the whole joke, don't you see? They got a chance to rag their tormentor-in-chief, and they made the most of it—young rascals. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"They'll be greatly relieved," Mr. Harkles was beginning again—

Mr. Strangworth wiped his eyes. "Will they!" he said drily. "We'll see—when I've done with them. . . . Now, with regard to the proceedings in which you took a part up to the time when you dexterously extricated yourself so as to escape unpleasant consequences,—how did the whole affair strike you?"

"How did it strike you?" Mr. Harkles, with that creeping chill on him again, cautiously asked.

"I'll tell you," Mr. Strangworth answered. "Try one of these——" and he pushed a box of cigars towards Mr. Harkles, who helped himself and lit up with a hand that shook. He could not have explained his own nervousness, but there it was; his hand shook, and it was Mr. Strangworth now who smiled. He looked like a man who had settled down to enjoy himself.

"When I joined your party that evening," he began deliberately, punctuating his pauses with little attentions to his cigar, "I saw, of course, that there was some game in progress, and I also saw that part of it was not to let some one be enlightened with regard to the fact that the head of the Winged Victory was missing. It was also obvious that, on my approach, the word went round that that obtuse, blundering old bore, Strangworth, was coming and would give away the whole show."

"Oh, I am sure no one——" Mr. Harkles began to protest, and the recording angel dipped his pen in the ink; but Mr. Strangworth worked his cigar in the interests of truth, and silenced the sinner.

"I saw at a glance that the game might be made amusing," he continued, "so I took a hand in it myself; that is to say, I took the whole group in hand, and did a little private 'drawing' on my own account. You may remember that every time I spoke I seemed to be on the point of spoiling your game."

"You seemed to be on the point of spoiling the game," Mr. Harkles repeated blankly.

"Yes. With a view to keeping you on tenterhooks, I brought the subject back to the point time after time. The ingenuity you exercised in order to head me off was diverting."

"Oh—the ingenuity we exercised in order to head you off was diverting," Mr. Harkles repeated, his mind misgiving him as to the amount he himself had contributed to Mr. Strangworth's "diversion."

"It was evident that the Sliver ass was all out of it, therefore he was the one from whom you were guarding the knowledge that the statue was mutilated," Mr. Strangworth proceeded. "That settled, it only remained to find out why; and, seeing that the Sliver is an ass, there was no difficulty about that when I chose. Of course, when the Sliver gave himself away, I knew where I was."

"You knew where you were," Mr. Harkles echoed. "That must have been the moment," he added reflectively, "when it occurred to me that—er—perhaps—you knew where you were."

"Doubtless. The precise moment when it occurred to you, for the first time in all our long acquaintance, that I might—perhaps—know where I was."

Mr. Harkles's blood curdled. So this man, whom they had made a butt of under the delusion that he was too obtuse to be aware of what they were at, had all the time been affecting stupidity for the purpose of "diverting" himself at their expense! It is a mistake in any case to suppose that a bore must be a fool, and dangerous to presume on the supposition. Mr. Harkles thought of the biter bit and made a frantic effort to recall how and on what occasions he had enabled Mr. Strangworth to "divert" himself in his own peculiar way with a bite. Probably there was some "diverting" purpose in this revelation. Mr. Harkles warned himself to look out. He must put two and two together and be on his guard. It was not pure affection that had decided Mr. Strangworth to show his hand! From thinking him a bore of no account Mr. Harkles jumped to the opposite conclusion. Strangworth, it seemed, was a man to be feared. It occurred to Mr. Harkles that the torment he was then in had been deliberately induced by Mr. Strangworth by way of "diversion." The word rankled horribly but without suggesting to Mr. Harkles that Mr. Strangworth might, perchance, "in his own peculiar way," be a humourist. But even if it had, his

studies of human nature being limited, he was without the comforting assurance that the true humourist is not vindictive. There was a pause during which each, occupied with his own thoughts, brought his cigar into play as an excuse for his silence. The length of Mr. Harkles's face betrayed the nature of his reflections. Mr. Strangworth was not smiling, but there was no evidence in his kindly eyes that his thoughts were unpleasant. At last he ejaculated: "Chattering parrots! . . . Clever chap, poor Col! He does a great deal of the chattering himself. I like to hear them talk, those lads. I like to hear a parrot talk. Everybody does. There is the wonder of it. You try to make out what it says. You are surprised when there is some sense in its queer phrases, and the question is: do they mean anything to the parrot? It repeats incessantly. It picks up and repeats. So do those lads—quite accurately, too, very often. Yet, for all practical purposes, no more usefully than the parrot. It is all talk with them. Just talk. And all the time, look at the World! Think what they might be doing for the world! Think what is threatening! What times! And these young chaps with no more sense of responsibility than the parrot. Eating and drinking, and idling and phrasing it, just like the parrot. For most of them it is fiddling while Rome is burning."

Mr. Harkles was embarrassed. He felt himself both accused and held responsible, most unfairly. He thought of saying, "When in Rome," but Mr. Strangworth gave him no time to set up this specious defence.

"Nice fellows, most of them," Mr. Strangworth harked back. "Quite worth troubling about. Col Drindon now—there's a lad I like. He's redeemable still."

"Made a bad start," said moral Mr. Harkles, shaking his head. "Lady Ballard and Sarb——"

Mr. Strangworth held up his hand. "Leave the ladies out," he said decisively. "That's my principle."

"Quite so," said Mr. Harkles. "An excellent principle. But in considering cases of this kind, how do you put two and two together with the ladies left out?"

"The present case is a case of drunk and disorderly. It is essentially necessary that there should be neither drunkenness nor disorder."

"Oh, come now," Mr. Harkles remonstrated, "is that tone consistent? Of course, it must not be habitual, but boys will

be boys, you know, and—well, you showed yourself amused, just now."

"*I* amused at drunkenness!" Mr. Strangworth said severely. "*I* amused with debauch! *I* amused with bawdy talk! What the devil do you mean, sir? No, sir, I am amused by none of these things. The drunkenness and disorderliness must be stopped. I intend to stop the drunkenness and disorderliness. For one reason"—his tone moderated—"for one reason, because it disturbs me. For another, because some of those young rascals are lovable, and it—well, it hurts me to see them wasted."

Mr. Harkles stared at his wineglass, thoroughly discomposed, a man so at fault that his confident self-assurance, which had been shaken off and on the whole evening, now deserted him utterly. "What do you propose to do?" he said in trepidation.

"Warn them through you," was the reply. "Warn them through you that if the thing occurs again they'll get bad marks for conduct. You know what that means. And they know what it means. The young rascals who are looking forward to public careers will shy off. I've gauged them. They'll shy off. D'you see? That will break up the clique."

Mr. Harkles's jaw had dropped. "*I*—warn them!" he gasped. "My dear sir, I never interfere."

"I know," Mr. Strangworth said laconically. "But you are going to interfere now." He gave Mr. Harkles a hard look and added slowly—"*Or worse will come of it.*"

Having spoken, Mr. Strangworth leant back in his chair and smoked placidly, as he might have smoked in one of those intervals of sociable silence which happen with intimate friends. Harkles imagined that he himself presented an equally plausible appearance of composed detachment, but he did not. The state of his mind showed in various little fidgety movements, in his troubled eye, in his unconsciousness of time.

So he—Julius Harkles—had been brought all this way out of town and made to sit out a ridiculous freak dinner for the sole purpose of being told that he must make Gregor Strangworth comfortable! At this, his first coherent thought, he so swelled with indignation that he burst his staylace. But he wouldn't be made a tool of; on that he was determined—though not for long. Other thoughts sapped his courage. "*Or worse will come of it,*" that was their text. He felt himself threatened, and the threat was the more compelling because it was indefinite. What means besides money might not this man have to carry out his

threat? They had met each other at the Club year in year out, knowing and caring nothing for each other. He had not even suspected that Strangworth was rich, or perceived that he was a man of good birth—which, in view of this ancestral mansion, these family portraits, and all the other evidences of inheritance with which the house overflowed, of course he must be. Until now, Mr. Harkles had thought of him only as an outsider who had got into the Club on his own merits. On official occasions and in the newspapers he was mentioned as "distinguished," but, as Mr. Harkles was in the habit of attaching importance to distinctions of rank by birth only, this had not inspired his respect. What other particulars might he not have been mistaken in! There was that remark Lord Terry de Beach had let drop, "Strangworth's not the kind of man I should like to hustle myself." What did he mean? A man of whom Lord Terry de Beach could be afraid under any circumstances must be an uncommonly strong man. Mr. Harkles mentally glanced at the unexpected establishment. He thought of the unexpected dinner, the unexpected laughter, the unexpected sentiment of that "It hurts me," the unexpectedly violent outbreak against drunkenness and debauchery. He allowed that the man was eminent, at the top of his own tree; also he was obviously eccentric. Probably he had the means to carry his unexpectedness to any length. Mr. Harkles vaguely saw Society turn its back on him, and felt himself a blighted being withering in exile.

"I will see what I can do," he said at last.

"Yes, you will see what you can do," Mr. Strangworth rejoined, and gave him another queer look.

Having spoken, he carefully extinguished the stump of his cigar on an ash tray, and rose from the table. "Wonderful weather," he observed, "but close. Are you for fresh air?"

Mr. Harkles took the hint. "I am," he observed. "I enjoyed the walk from the station. I am going to walk back."

"Very wise," Mr. Strangworth commented. "Exercise keeps a man fit. But before you go will you oblige me——"

"Oh, certainly. Anything I can do——"

"By coming this way——" And Mr. Strangworth led him from the room.

As they crossed the hall he uttered the word "lift," and a servant stepped forward and followed them noiselessly.

The gallery at the end of the hall branched off on either side

into two long corridors. They turned into the one on the right, at the very end of which was a light. Lifts were undreamed of when the house was designed and no provision had been made for one, but Mr. Strangworth had run up a projection the whole height of the house on the outside to remedy the omission. The projection looked like a square tower at the end of the house, and was in keeping with its other picturesque irregularities.

The lift landed them in a vestibule at the top of the house and left them there. At the opposite side of the vestibule there hung a handsome curtain of Spanish leather. Only the one word had been spoken so far since they left the dining-room, but now, standing with his hand on the curtain ready to lift it, Mr. Strangworth spoke solemnly. "No guest leaves this house," he said, "until God has been petitioned to have mercy upon him."

So saying, he ushered the astonished Harkles into a beautiful, dimly lighted chapel.

At the foot of the altar steps there stood a faldstool, at which Mr. Strangworth knelt. And behind him Julius Harkles also knelt—in his evening trousers he knelt on the floor—such was the compulsion he suffered in the grip of this terribly unexpected man. And Mr. Strangworth prayed for Mr. Harkles as if he had been a common pauper.

This exercise over, Mr. Strangworth conducted his guest to the lift and there formally wished him good-night. Mr. Harkles managed to get out a conventional expression of thanks for a most enjoyable evening. This was gravely received with a bow; but he was not asked to repeat his visit.

On his way down the drive his step was arrested by strains of triumphant music—sacred music. They fell from above. Mr. Harkles looked up. The windows of the chapel, dimly lighted, were visible from where he stood. He pictured Mr. Strangworth again kneeling there, again praying for him, and he felt that, of all the mean advantages Strangworth had taken of him that evening, this was distinctly the meanest.

CHAPTER V

ELLA'S INTELLECT WARS AGAINST SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES

1

"SEEK peace and ensue it," might have been as truthfully said of success. Ella, from the time that she could think or plan at all, had mapped out for herself a life of success, and silently, patiently, without haste, without rest, sometimes passively, sometimes actively, as occasion offered and required, but always honourably, she had made direct for her goal. The first part of the way had seemed long, at times the sense of waiting had been tedious, the work very hard, but it was the work that sustained her. She had enjoyed the rapture of pursuing without suffering the blight of even a momentary doubt of the result. *Failure* and *vanquished* were words which she had banished from her mind. She had a presentiment of success which never wavered, and it was as if she had ensured success by refusing to allow the possibility of not attaining to all that she aimed at. And here she was, as she had anticipated, her first round with the world fought with the weapons of her choice, beauty, knowledge, charm, self-sufficiency,—here she was without a feather of her plumage damaged by the encounter—the Winged Victory with her pinions spread, soaring towards the zenith—*her* zenith, the material heaven of her choice.

No wonder that this London of hers was only the City Joyous of her dreams! No wonder that she perceived nothing of the other side to trouble her, saw nothing of its sorrows, shames, and sins; heard nothing but gladness in its myriad cries. For her the children only sang and laughed and danced; for her the hurrying multitudes all went their several ways on pleasure bent. Even for the weary toilers there was congratulation in her sympathy. To have work to do, that was their happiness! She thought of them as endowed with her own superb vitality, as enjoying their work as she enjoyed hers, as feeling fatigue as she felt it, a satisfaction in itself, the token of achievement; and as luxuriating, as she luxuriated when she rested, in the delightful sense of rest deserved, well earned.

Of course, there were happenings that might have troubled her had she let them, but her joy in life was not to be suspended

for more than moments at a time just then. It is a commonplace of ordinary observation that it is not the troubles of life but our attitude towards them and the spirit in which we face them that makes for their effect upon us. In Ella's case unpleasant incidents were the exception, and were immediately effaced by her more ordinary experiences. Her radiant health kept her unruffled when things occurred which would have jarred upon more irritable nerves, and also made for the sanity of her outlook and coloured her impressions wholesomely. She moved to music in those days, the music of success; there was a singing at her heart, the song of success. Her energy was inexhaustible, the number of things in which she was interested, so long as they seemed to have some bearing on her great object in life—music, art, literature, for instance—was manifold, and her fine intelligence aided by her keenness carried her along with unflagging spirit. Day followed day, and each was like the other, yet each, like the fingers of a hand, was different. There was no monotony. Expected events often tarried; the surprise of the unexpected was often repeated. She took people as she found them, and for the most part she found them pleasant. But even when they were not pleasant they were funny, like Mrs. Filmer Dabbs and certain ladies who asked her in confidential whispers would she mind telling them what she did to make her complexion so lovely, her hair so glossy and abundant, and who was her *corsetière*. Sunday she usually spent with Mr. and Mrs. Bosc. She would drive out early in the day, occasionally in time for breakfast, and put up her horses at the Bosquet, so as to be able to return when the fancy took her. But she enjoyed these days of gentle caressment. Mother and son surrounded her with unobtrusive kindness, made her feel that they delighted in her coming, which is the welcome that expands the heart. They did not flatter her, they loved her, and in wordless ways made her feel that they did. In the radiant summer weather, after the bustle and rattle and closeness of London, she felt the charm of the beautiful garden, the quiet, the freshness; she revelled in the scent and colour of the flowers, in the restful green glimpses of Strangworth Park, in the stability of the grand old forest trees; or, when they sat on the other side of the garden, whence the land dipped to the valley, and curving, rose again in a long sweep to the low hills, gazing on the dim, rich, misty prospect rolling out to the infinite, she would picture her purpose there in the

Beyond, her land of Beulah, and her spirit would rise quickened to yet more strenuous effort.

She never thought of the garden as "punctuated with summer-houses," and she would have resented the ridicule implied in the expression. Every detail of the summerhouses was justified to her by the long, lovely days she spent in them. Each stood to her for a separate delight. The old Frenchman's instinct of beauty in placing them was worthy of acclaim. In his own language he had dedicated each to a purpose poetically, also religiously, for all loveliness to him was of "The Kingdom," a direct emanation from the Divine. So he gave his Eastern arbour "To the Freshness of Morning and the Diamond Dew;" and moved round with the sun "To the Joy of Midday and the Flowers;" then "To the Glory of the Sunset;" and for the solemn night, when the soul is nourished with food for contemplation, he had dedicated his favourite station "To the Holy Calm of Moonlight and the Stars." Stations he called them, thinking of the Stations of the Cross, though not Stations of penitence, pity, and tears; his were Stations of the shriven soul claiming its reward.

Since his death, mother and son, when they were together, lived the round of the summer days in the arbours, communing with the Divine in Nature. Their breakfast parlour was "To the Freshness of Morning and the Diamond Dew." Thence they viewed a little wilderness enclosed by trees, a grassy space of ferns and foliage plants and golden gorse, on which the spider overnight was wont to spread his filmy draperies. In the early sunshine, leaf and blade and web sparkling with iridescent gems, an ever-recurring miracle of beauty, were an ever-recurring wonder and delight to the breakfasters, a thought of the Morning of God.

They took their luncheon to "The Joy of Midday and the Flowers," overlooking fragrant beds and borders aglow with colour, an earthly paradise, reminiscent, and also a foretaste.

Tea "To the Glory of the Sunset" was always a supreme delight, sometimes tender, sometimes awesome. There were evenings when a riot of colour flamed in the sky, wicked tints ominously suggestive of a world seething in sin, on which fire and brimstone were preparing to descend in rain. And there were melancholy evenings when great black mountainous masses of cloud shot with crimson collected, silently portentous; and, though the spectators spoke cheerfully of a threatened change

in the weather, there was foreboding at their hearts, and those who prayed earnestly petitioned for mercy on the doomed. But there were heavenly evenings too, when change followed change of tint, each absorbing in its loveliness, from the first faint rose, delicate as the flush on the cheek of a sleeping babe, to the last pale gold that shone a background from which the forest trees in Strangworth Park stood out, marshalling their perfect forms sombrely against the radiance, dignified in the grandeur of their size and their age-old association with the past. These were tender times, when Mrs. Bosc would steal out her tiny hand to her son, and the two would sit and gaze in sympathetic silence, entranced, their feelings too exquisite to find utterance in words, until the soft pearl grey closed on the lingering glory like a curtain, and, slowly deepening into the clear dark of the night, ended the vision and released them from its spell.

But it was in the arbour where they dined, "To the Holy Calm of Moonlight and the Stars," that the great uplifting came. There, when the gay little meal was over and the servants had gone for good, they would turn from the table—on which the shaded lamplight, brightly concentrated on fruit and flowers and shining silver, made a pretty still-life picture—and sit, facing the solemn night; a night, perhaps, when, in the dark encircling sapphire vault above, a myriad worlds sparkled their messages; or it might be a night of luminous greyness with stars sparsely sprinkled and the crescent moon hung low over the Delectable Hills; or a night of silvery moonrise, when the misty distance was a wonderland, enchanted. But whatever the night, whether sparkling starlight or luminous grey or shadowy moonlight, or even when from their lamplit island there was only a dimly transparent wall of darkness to be seen —these good people turned the time to account; kneeling in spirit; giving themselves up to the hallowed influence; uplifted in prayer and praise and thanksgiving. True mystics, their lives rich both in action and contemplation, they knew the joy of eventful living, and were blessed with a foretaste of the peace that passeth understanding. Do well and doubt not, that was the key in which the voluntary of their lives was written.

Sometimes Mr. Strangworth would sit with them, and then there would be talk rising to the heights on which they basked. The true mystics are of one family, one with each other even

when not of the same sect; no sectarian narrowness separates their hearts even when they draw their spiritual sustenance from different sources. They do not attempt to reconcile these differences; choose between them, they say; accept them as satisfactory evidence that there is a form for every taste, for every temperament. No two of us are alike, and each knows his own needs best, and whence cometh his help. God, who Himself experiences the difficulty of transmitting even His own messages from one to another of us by way of our finite faculties, vouchsafes to each of us a separate revelation. There is no going wrong when the Love of God constraineth us; the True Church is in our hearts. Where love is not there is no God, let the forms of religion be practised as diligently as may be; and that the converse holds good is amply proved by the answer the Nonconformist receives to his prayers.

Mr. Strangworth and the Boscs were of different churches, but spiritually they met on the same high plane, and were in perfect accord.

Ella had never realised Christianity as a Life and joyous; it had been taught to her as a Cult, and a cold one. This element, therefore, in her intercourse with her friends disturbed her. The sensuous charm of their surroundings she felt, but she was baulked of the spiritual uplifting by the attitude of her mind. Sunshine warmed her through, and she loved it; colour and perfume she delighted in; and moonlit summer nights cradled her whole being to repose; but the thought of the stars as worlds depressed her; they were not worlds that she could conquer, and their appalling numbers lessened the importance of the one that was hers. The immensity of the universe, the wonder and the mystery of the whole creation, and the power of the Creator were dreadful things to her that she would rather not think about; and talk on the subject was always a discomfort. Such talk was strange, it was unpractical, unnecessary; she had no use for it. She did not want to look up, she wanted to look straight ahead. When Mrs. Bosc, after moments of ecstatic contemplation, took her rosary out of the little box in which she carried it in her handbag, and silently told her beads, Ella shrank from her.

"I wish you had this comfort, my dear," Mrs. Bosc said to her on one occasion, indicating the rosary. "On such nights I feel the blessed saints and the holy angels are all about us"—Ella shivered—"and I am uplifted and must pray. *The heavens*

declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handy-work."

"Day after day uttereth speech, and night after night sheweth knowledge." Mr. Bosc caught up the entrancing measure.

And Mr. Strangworth sonorously concluded: *"There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard."*

Often they joyed like this in glad antiphony, and Ella wished they wouldn't. The exercise filled her with a sort of shame; she did not know where to look. Something in her fought against spiritual influences. She knew them to be somehow dangerous to her purpose, to the exercise of her own will. It was as if she feared to be lifted from the earth and shown a way more excellent than her own way. She respected the religious opinions of her friends, but did not think religion a suitable subject for everyday discourse. She had no conception of the happiness, the more abundant life which is only to be found in religion. She saw their happiness, but attributed it to the ease of their worldly position. When they spoke of God-with-them she felt repelled. Religion had been presented to her in terms of penance and renunciation. Walking with God meant to her abandoning all that made life worth living. Being she understood; of the joy of Becoming she had never heard; and if she had known the word "religiosity," she would have accused them of it.

Yet, though they could not break down the barrier which separated her imprisoned spirit from theirs, they held her. They held her by the heart. Next to the Duke, she clung to Mr. Strangworth and the Boscs; but more especially to Mr. Strangworth. From the moment of their first acquaintance she found herself looking up to him. And in this instance she showed the woman's intuition triumphing where the men's finite faculties had utterly failed them.

2

But it was only in the Duke's company that Ella's happiness was quite unalloyed. There was no drawback of uncongenial conversation with him, and she looked forward to his furtive visits as to the one great pleasure of her life. She never mentioned these visits to anyone. No one knew of them, and she did not want anyone to know. So long as they were secret the pleasure was peculiarly her own. She never knew when to

expect him, but he seemed to know when she was in need of the stimulant he brought her; and the mysterious sympathy which drew him to her just at the right moment was a part of the charm. When he came her heart expanded, when he left her she was strengthened and refreshed.

Yet there is no explaining this result. It must have been the effect of his personality. It was not his rank. The fetish of class has been pulled to pieces of late years, and personality has come into its own. Personality, good or bad, is the mainspring of all social combinations. When personality appears on the scene rank takes a back seat. Ella was modern enough to be emancipated from the fetish of class, and in any case she was more susceptible to personality than to position—though no one knew the value of position better. She had always associated with personages enough to dispel the enchantment experienced by those who only view rank from a distance. Near-by the human being becomes apparent, and it was from near-by that Ella was accustomed to regard the Duke. The tribute of lip-service she paid to his position in no way affected the ease of their intercourse. She called him "Your Grace" with as little concern as she called other men "Mister."

Ella was too elemental and direct to trouble herself about subtle distinctions, or subtleties of any kind. She noted her feelings sometimes, but she did not analyse them. Introspection was foreign to her nature; she was always on the lookout. High principled and with strict ideas of right and wrong, she went her way; but she was not conventional. She never actually thought about it, but if she had she would have maintained that the Duke had every right to come when he chose. To her he stood for patron, adviser, and utterly disinterested and very good friend. She had every right to the pleasure of his company, and if he found pleasure in hers all the better. She was set on making him her father-in-law, and to win his affection was part of her programme. So she left it, simply. She had no doubt about any result that she could bring her mind to bear upon and her will to coerce.

But there are things which no mind can be brought to bear upon satisfactorily, things that we have no knowledge to account for, no words to define; and Ella was at times obsessed by these things. Alone in her sitting-room at night, far from everyone else in the great house, she experienced sensations that disturbed her—creepy feelings, forebodings. Sometimes she

would be roused from her reading to startled attention by the certainty that she was not alone. Signals that could neither be seen nor heard, but of which she somehow became aware, were made to her. It was as if someone were trying to reach her, had the means of communication permitted. But the means of communication in her case were imperfect. Her spiritual perception was latent; the dominant ascendency of her mind held it in check; and only under rare conditions could it manifest. In that respect her development had been retarded by her wilful devotion to the material side of life. Her chosen attitude had determined the loss. The call when it came found her relentless. She was set on what the world calls success by means of her finite faculties, and would not allow, even to herself, that other and further faculties are comprehended in human nature. "All that sort of thing is superstition and nonsense," she said.

And she had the courage of her denial. When the awesome sensation was importunate, she would take a candle and search the empty rooms. She would force herself to laugh if there seemed to be something more than dancing shadows about her; and when she had the feeling of soft footsteps following her, she would look over her shoulder and smile, and say to herself that it was a curious illusion, a sign of overwork, and she understood how it came to pass that houses were said to be haunted. She accused her nerves, and did not see that her splendid physical condition and matchless courage made all doubt of their strength absurd.

Only on one spot was her certainty shaken, and that was the spot on which her search invariably ended—in front of the Lady Alicia Brabant's portrait. She had never any intention of going to look at the portrait, but there she found herself always, holding her candle up to light the face, and peering into it. And sometimes on her way to bed she would suddenly feel that she must go and look at it. This irritated her, but she had to go. And here thoughts would crowd in upon her which elsewhere never occurred to her. But it was not like thinking; it was more as if ideas were being somehow conveyed to her. Sometimes she answered aloud, making an involuntary effort to give form to an impression. Where were now the many Brabant ladies who had flitted about these rooms? And what would they think of her if they knew? Would they interest themselves in her if they could? Would they help her or

harm her? The deep, quiet eyes of the portrait answered her, "Help!"

"I should have thought you would hate me," was her answer, "a low-born interloper!"

But the deep eyes looked love and pity only. This was the suggestion that she could not treat lightly, though she tried. "They talk of speaking likenesses," she said to the portrait one night, attempting to be flippant. "I should say yours was speaking." But she instantly repented the utterance, and hastily exclaimed: "I mean no disrespect!" For the face had clouded.

"An effect of light," Ella said to herself, but she fled to her own room and locked the door, and owned herself beaten, and raged: "I am doing too much! I am becoming weak-minded."

Then gazing at the portrait of the beautiful unknown girl she had found upstairs, whose lovely eyes looked only love into her own, she would recover herself and fall asleep solaced, as by a friend.

3

She was sitting alone one night, untroubled by anything, her eyes on an open book on her lap, but not reading. Her mind had suddenly wandered to these invasions, which she called "tricks of her nerves"; and she was quietly taking herself to task for letting her nerves impose upon her commonsense in this ridiculous way, arming herself against future contingencies —when there came an interruption, a draught that made her shiver. She looked up and was startled to see a man standing in the doorway. A man in a long Inverness cloak, his chin concealed by a white silk muffler, a wideawake hat drawn down over his eyes,—the disguise of the villain in a melodrama. Ella's nerves were equal to this surprise. She looked at him coolly, but thought of the poker.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

The villain, slowly raising his hand, slowly removed his hat. And they both burst out laughing.

Ella jumped up. "Your Grace has no respect for my nerves!" she exclaimed.

"On the contrary," his Grace replied. "My confidence in your nerves is complete. Otherwise I should not have tried this —er—experiment, don't you know. To see if you recognised

me. I would not risk frightening you, my dear." He put his hat on again and posed. "Shall I do?" he asked.

"If your Grace means would anyone recognise you," she answered, "certainly, no one would."

He had a large parcel under his arm, which moved just then. Ella drew back. "Is it alive?" she said with repugnance.

The Duke was amused at her repugnance. "You, a country girl, shying at live things!" He smiled.

"Perhaps it is because I am a country girl," she defended her shrinking. "I know how nasty live things can be."

The Duke bustled back to the hall, took off his wraps and undid the parcel, talking the while.

"Something in that," he said. "*Experientia docet*—even *stultos*—into which genus you do not come. Now, guess what I have here! Can't, eh? *Watteau!*"

Hearing the word imperfectly as he jerked it out, Ella thought it was "What oh!" and a symptom of insanity. She awaited developments in some alarm.

The Duke returned to her holding aloft a picture. "A beauty, eh?" he demanded. He placed it on a chair and surveyed it from different points of view with his head on one side, then looked for her answer.

Standing with clasped hands gazing at the lovely thing, she just whispered, "For me!"

"Ah!" he exclaimed delighted. "You feel it? I knew you would! Saw it advertised for sale. Secured it. Came up on purpose. Just right for this room, eh? Where'll we hang it? Let me see. Don't like nails or cords visible. Got a wire at the back. Not a nail or hammer in the house, I suppose."

He fetched both from his cloak in the hall, and, having chosen a place, hung the picture for her, and made her sit in full view of it, taking a seat himself in full view of her. The picture she made sitting with her hands folded on her lap gazing up as at a sacred emblem, was worth looking at.

"How am I to thank you!" she said at last with a sigh, turning to him.

"My dear, your appreciation. I am well thanked. But now . . . about yourself. How are you? How is everything? Satisfactory, eh?" Thus he ended the picture episode, and led her away to other subjects. "Bosc always 'invaluable'?" he asked. "Your own word, you know. Eh?"

Ella answered with a smile.

"Good fellow, Bosc," the Duke pursued. "And Mrs. Bosc. Always a dear. You've made Strangworth's acquaintance, too? Must have. The Bosquet is one of his haunts. Eccentric. Great man all round. If you ever wanted a friend, and you never will while I live, let Strangworth take your hand and lead you. Blindfold. No better man. No wiser. No sager. And kind!"

"I was sure of it," Ella said. "The first time I saw him I felt I could trust him implicitly."

"Good." He jerked out the word, then jumped up abruptly, and wandered round the room.

Returning to Ella, he stood awhile absently looking down at her.

"Take an interest in your spiritual welfare, I dare say—all three of them," he remarked at last.

"They talk religion a good deal," she said dryly.

"And—er—what is your own feeling on the subject, if I may venture to ask?"

"I have no feeling on the subject."

She looked him in the face to say it, and her lips tightened.

"You—er—wouldn't find it a help—their way of thinking?" he asked tentatively.

"Their way of thinking—or rather their way of talking about what they think on that subject, is distasteful to me."

"It might be." He pondered a little. "Well. Yes." The words seemed to indicate a mind made up, but to what effect it was impossible to say.

He took another turn up and down the room. "Seen any interesting people lately?" he asked. "Is there anyone you would particularly like to see?"

"Yes," she answered, and smiled. A copy of *Punch* lay on the table near her. Indicating it, she said, "I should like to meet that gentleman."

The Duke beamed apprehension. "Mr. Punch, eh? I'd like to meet him myself! 'Gentleman.' Quite the right word. Does his duty pleasantly and never offends."

Upon this happy note he took his leave, in his queer abrupt way, with an "Au revoir" from the hall. The picture was the first of many he brought and hung for her.

CHAPTER VI

OPPORTUNITIES OF WHICH ELLA MAKES THE MOST

1

It was weeks before Col Drindon dared to return to the Corner House, and all the time his poem burned in his pocket. As a peace-offering it had not been needed, but might it not answer another purpose now? Readjust him in Ella's good graces, or act as an anodyne to make her forget that accursed interruption? What did she think of it? But did she think of it at all? This second question was long in occurring to him; when at last it did, he found himself emboldened. He argued that to the Winged Victory, busy as she was and always surrounded by admiring crowds, neither he nor his affairs could be of more than momentary consequence. In other circumstances the supposition would have galled him, but now it was a comfort to suppose that she had not perceived the ridiculous and humiliating position in which Lady Ballard and Sarb's irruption had placed him. Having persuaded himself that this was really the case, he flattered himself that he could begin all over again with Ella, with a better chance than ever of entrenching himself in her good graces.

He sought her at the tea-hour when her staff were absent and she usually kept guard alone. The humour of her smile when he appeared undeceived him as to one of his soothing suppositions. His humiliation had not escaped her, and she had been amused. He could have wrung Lady Brandy and Soda's neck!

"I hope you are well," Ella said demurely, "and the good lady, your wife."

"That lady is not my wife," he answered pettishly. "Why rag me about her? She is only an acquaintance—a friend. Rather an exacting friend," he added ruefully.

Ella smiled. "What is it to 'rag'?" she asked, tranquilly disposing of the subject.

Col's countenance cleared. Her tranquillity reassured him. It did more. He would not have owned to a doubt of her, but other people's doubts were bound to recur to him and discount his certainty. Her manner had resolved all doubt. Had there been anything equivocal in her own position, she would have

spotted the meaning of the Brandy and Soda episode. The absence of suspicion vouched for her that there was no nastiness either in her life or mind. "Nastiness" in his new view of life was his word for the kind of thing Lady Ballard and Sarb represented, therefore his relief now was twofold. He felt himself cleansed by the purity of this atmosphere, in which there was not a suspicion of the existence of such a thing as "nastiness"; and he saw Ella on a pedestal, and himself safe in her good opinion.

He had half a mind to suppress the poem. Why revive the humiliating incident of the Faded Flower? Ella was not taking him seriously, but she was taking him pleasantly, and what could be better for a fresh start?—Replying to her question, he defined "ragging" minutely to give himself time to make up his mind, but while still hesitating he inadvertently took the manuscript from his pocket, and the verses caught her eye.

"Poetry!" she exclaimed.

"Do you like poetry?" he asked.

"Some poetry," she answered cautiously, and then, because his countenance fell, and she could never bear to wound any one, she added: "But when I do like poetry, I delight in it; and perhaps our tastes agree."

"Oh, as to that," said Col, with a deprecating shrug. "You see, these are only some silly verses of my own."

"You are a poet then?"

Good heavens! He had told her twice already that he was a poet, and she had forgotten! He looked unutterable chagrin at her. "Query?" he said.

But she had turned away, and did not see his chagrin. They were standing near the daïs at the end of the room. She mounted to the top step and sat down. "You will read me your poem?" she said, winning gladness back to his heart with a smile.

"May I sit too?" he asked. On a sign of acquiescence, he settled himself on the step at her feet, and nervously unfolded his manuscript. He had to make an effort to command his voice, but, once started, he read unaffectedly. The poem was not like anything that Ella knew, and she probably would not have cared for it had she read it to herself, but Col's rendering brought it home to her senses. His words were exotic flowers of speech, his phrasing musical, his imagery a scheme of colour, all harmoniously blended as the separate instruments of an

orchestra are blended by a conductor strong enough to hold them together. But Ella's untrained ear did not detect in detail the symphonic play of rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, and imagery by which the current of thought was sustained and conveyed. The whole orchestra was as one instrument to her, playing a theme that stirred her, as colour and perfume stirred her, without expressing anything definite.

At the conclusion all that she could find to say was, "That is fresh." But Col, looking up into her face, saw in her sparkling eyes and in the wild-rose tint that flushed her cheeks all the feeling he desired to excite, and was content.

There was a little pause, during which he shuffled the pages into their places, and waited; she was bound to speak again.

"That is fresh," she repeated. "You did not tell me the title?"

"The Lament of the Faded Flower."

"That refreshes my memory," she said.

"You had forgotten!" he exclaimed.

"No. I remembered the incident of the Faded Flower, but I did not recognise you as the hero."

"You are cruel," he complained. "The offence was accidental. I hoped to wipe it out."

"There was no offence," she comforted him. "The compliment was spoilt by an oversight, but what you intended was obvious."

"If I had looked at the flower I should not have seen it," he protested. "I can see nothing but you when you are in sight. I never dreamt that a flower could fade in the sunshine which is you."

"A garish light is bad for flowers," she was beginning—

"The light of heaven to me," he interposed.

"Take care," she warned him, "or I shall think it is sunstroke that you are suffering from."

"You had forgotten me!" he reproached her. "I was only one of the crowd."

"Till I knew you for a poet," she acknowledged. "There is never a crowd of poets!"

They looked into each other's faces, and for a blessed interval happily capped this climax with their smiles.

But man is never content. The smiles were a pause, and he wanted to push on. Making an effort to find something to say, he glanced across the room. "My godmother!" he exclaimed,

jumping up. "To be continued in our next," he added hurriedly, and went forward to meet the Princess Anna.

The Princess Anna at last! The unexpected with a vengeance! Weeks had passed since the opening of the Exhibition, and Ella, remembering that royal promises are said to be brittle, had despaired of ever seeing the lady again,—despaired, because the Princess had been the only understanding one of all the crowd of women that hovered about her, and Ella was modern enough to value a woman's appreciation.

The Princess brought with her Lady Janet Brastaby, in attendance, General Lord Imlac and his nephew, Captain Paul McAllen Ray, and Mr. Strangworth.

Col's exclamation "My godmother!" which Ella mistook for an expletive, made her aware of their arrival. The whole length of the room divided them. The Princess had stopped in the doorway, and was peering about through her lorgnon. She saw her godson first, and rolled out a salutation in her loud, thick voice. "Colin! And yust where I should 'ave expected to find 'im!" (Her English went to pieces when she relaxed among friends.)

There was an affectionate good-nature in the tone of her greeting, and it was with affection and unashamed that Colin kissed her hand.

"What are you doing 'ere?" she demanded.

"Reading a poem to the 'Winged Victory,'" he answered frankly.

His godmother collected the attention of the group with a wave of her hand. "Vot is dat for barefaced?" she cried. Then to Colin, "But what hass the poor Winged Victory done to deserve such punishment? And vare iss she? No more? Collapsed? Done for?—*Ah!*" She had caught sight of Ella descending the steps of the daïs. Laying her hand on the General's arm, and upraising her voice as if she were addressing a public meeting, she exclaimed: "Look! See how she comes! *Schön! Ach, wunderschön!* Colin, *dear,* vat is the vord? Skim, fly, float——"

"'*More on wings than on feet,*'" he whispered.

Ella's approach was watched by the group as if it had been part of a performance. Unconscious of anything special in their attention, but with all the pleasure she felt shining in her eyes (her lips were grave), she crossed the intervening space as Colin said, *more on wings than on feet,* reached the Princess, and

sank to the ground in a deep curtsey. The Princess nodded round to her friends, as who should say, "I told you what to expect!" and fairly stamped applause.

Recovering herself, Ella stood, awaiting the Royal commands.

"Vell, I keep my word!" said the Princess. "I come again. And I bring dis Lady Janet Brastaby"—Ella curtseyed to the lady—"and dese shentlemen." Ella, glancing from one to another as directed by the Royal hand, recognised Mr. Strangworth, and smiled a welcome.

"Ach!" cried the Princess. "So you haff captured mein Strangworth, as also mein gottson, yes—you bad girl! Now I shall lose mein Sheneral!"

"Impossible, ma'am," the General protested, with a courtly bow. "I am content to adore beauty from afar off——"

"And stick to me who am no beauty." The Princess had him.

Flushing to the roots of his white hair, he pulled at his moustache savagely, but he was no match for her in quickness, and could only mutter a disconcerted, "Oh, too bad! too bad!"

The garrulous lady rattled on: "He iss so beautiful, mein Sheneral, in what you call dose fine togs, gold belts and gold bags." (The General had been on some official duty which necessitated full-dress uniform, and had had no time to change.) "You might do worse dan giff him *le jabot et les manchettes*, mademoiselle. *Il est veuf.*"

The wild-rose tint deepened on Ella's cheeks, Lady Janet and Gregor Strangworth laughed. The General, not knowing that, in the heyday of lace, *jabot et manchettes* of points was the customary *cadeau de noces* of the bride to her intended for his wedding dress, again muttered, "Oh, too bad! too bad!" to the great delight of the better informed.

The Princess led the way round, and did showman. She called attention to some lovely Irish lace.

"Jesuit's work," Mr. Strangworth observed.

"Why?" Lady Janet asked.

"A Jesuit introduced the art into Ireland," the Princess explained. "The Jesuits have their uses."

"As well as their charm," Lady Janet added.

Mr. Strangworth nodded agreement, but the General frowned, and Paul McAllen Ray compressed his lips. Both were strict Bible Christians, suspicious of Church intrigue and intolerant of dogma. There are many such to be found in the Army, Bible in one hand, sword in the other, preaching the love of

God and fighting their fellow-creatures, as occasion offers, from a high sense of duty. Young for his rank in the service, and not tall, Paul McAllen Ray showed wiry strength in his slimness, and alert attention in his glance. He was dark, with a high, narrow forehead, and the deep-set glittering grey eyes of the mystic who is also a man of action. It was an ascetic face, but with the brightness of a great joy in it, the face of one to whom the more abundant life is a reality rich in happiness.

He kept in the background, but Ella was conscious of him, as of a strong personality. He both attracted and repelled her. Once, as the party moved slowly round the Exhibition, she found him beside her, and he spoke: "Your beautiful work makes me glad," he said. "And you—the Divine gift has been vouchsafed to you. Surely God has set His seal upon you, He has so richly endowed you."

Ella, shrinking from him chilled, and resentful, as she always was, of such talk, bowed a bare acknowledgment of the lofty compliment, and made her escape.

Presently she was aware of him with Col Drindon, in close confabulation; and when the Princess took her leave, they walked away together arm-in-arm, a puzzling combination to Ella.

Lord Imlac claimed her attention next. "A rough old soldier is sadly out of place among your dainty fabrics," he said, beaming down upon her paternally.

"Oh, don't say that!" she remonstrated. "If a soldier disdains my lace, it is a sorrowful departure from precedent. There is honourable mention of many heroes in the History of Lace. A soldier should be at home here."

"Had you there, modest man!" the Princess laughed. "Vis all that gold lace on you, 'ow can you say not atome?"

Mr. Strangworth was evidently not in his usual form for giving encyclopedic information. He had answered when appealed to, but absently. From time to time Ella was conscious of his eyes on her, studying her with an intentness for which admiration did not account.

The General continued to defend his position.

"Well," he said at last, "if there is anything here fit for a soldier to wear, I'll wear it."

Ella that day was *en Steinquerque de Malines longue, à replis tortueuse* with *Fontange,* copied from the portrait of the Duchesse du Lude, but much modified, and very becoming to

her. To push her trade she adapted costumes from old portraits, which she modernised enough to prevent their looking archaic, and wore as an object lesson in the application of lace. She was fingering her scarf when the General threw down his gauge, and there flashed to her mind a suggestion from the feel of it. "A *Steinquerque!*" she exclaimed, and flew to a cabinet.

"What is a *Steinquerque?*" the General wanted to know.

Mr. Strangworth, a prey to the force of habit, but with his eyes and thoughts on Ella, mechanically imparted the information asked for. "A twisted lace necktie," he said, "so called after the Battle of Steinquerque fought by Maréchal Luxembourg against William of Orange."

Ella, returning with a scarf in her hand, took up the tale. "There were many gallant gentlemen at Steinquerque," she said; "among them the young French Princes of the Blood. Idle fops, you might have said, they went to the war so bedecked with jewels and lace; but at Steinquerque they proved their mettle. The call to arms came in the dead of night. They sprang from their beds, and dressed as best they could, in the darkness and confusion. And did they forget their finery? No! It was part of their uniform. There was no time for elaborate details. Ordinarily it took long to arrange their ties, but now they snatched them up, and—excuse me"—she stood on tiptoe, and deftly wound the scarf round the General's neck —"and flung them on and knotted them anyhow, and"—she undid a button of his tunic *sans façon,* and drew the long ends of the scarf through the button-hole—"fastened them, so! With that they went into action and met their fate like the gallant gentlemen they were."

She stepped back and surveyed the decoration. The old soldier stood stiff as a mannequin, with an appealing look in his eyes, not knowing whether he was being honoured or ridiculed; just so a big dog dressed up in ribbons, feeling humiliated, stands and looks, deprecating the game, but at the same time too well-bred to spoil it. Ella, pitying his embarrassment, took the scarf from his neck.

"There are stains here which tell a story," she said, spreading the lace out to show the ominous tokens. "So I say, 'A Steinquerque for a hero!'" and she held the scarf out to him.

The General saluted the relic of glory, and, taking it from her, carried it to his lips.

"Brava!" cried the Princess, clapping her hands.

"L'élégance n'a jamais fais tort au courage, et la politesse s'allie noblement à la bravoure!" Mr. Strangworth quoted.

The Princess examined the lace with interest.

"De Malines," she said. "A superb piece! I have nothing like it!" She pronounced the words wistfully.

"If your Royal Highness will do me the honour," and the gallant officer presented the scarf to her.

She beamed and took it, faintly protesting that it was "too bad" and "robbery," but she should value it above everything, and would Janet dear carry it for her.

Stepping back, the General betook himself to the desk to conclude the transaction with the Argus-Eyed, who was now again enthroned at the receipt of custom, with Miss Hildenborough in attendance. The Princess drew Mr. Strangworth aside, and Ella was left alone with Lady Janet Brastaby.

Ella was wae for her bonny bit of lace. She had meant to keep it, and was vexed with herself, when it was too late, for letting it go.

"You feel the parting," Lady Janet said, patting the treasure, which hung over her arm.

Ella, unaccustomed to be read like a book, looked at her in surprise. Lady Janet was interesting in appearance. Tall, slight, elegant, she dressed as in a uniform, little altered for any occasion. The undiscerning accused her of parsimoniousness, but the eye that was in and could appraise the cut of her tailor-made coats and skirts and the value of the lace on her blouse, was not so deceived. The woman who achieves *la simplicite élégante* has to pay for it. Her prematurely grey hair (she was under thirty) gave a becoming touch of distinction to the delicate regularity of her young face, besides being pathetically suggestive; and she had suffered, but how much only her hair betrayed—to the world at large. Her intimates judged her disillusioned by the vein of cynicism which marked her general outlook upon life.

"Lace has had its martyrs as well as its heroes," she added casually.

"You feel for the workers, then!" Ella exclaimed.

"Does that surprise you?" Lady Janet asked ironically.

"It raises a hope I have of finding friends to help them," Ella ventured.

"Shake hands with their friend then," Lady Janet rejoined, "and yours—if you will let me be your friend."

Hands had been held out to Ella before by great ladies—for the purpose of cheapening her lace; but this seemed a genuine friendly advance, and she responded impulsively. Lord Imlac ended the episode abruptly by claiming Lady Janet's attention. Left alone, Ella turned to offer her services to anyone who might require them. The Princess and Mr. Strangworth were standing apart, in earnest conversation. Their eyes were upon her, and she became aware of something peculiar in their scrutiny.

"Yes, I do see it," Mr. Strangworth was saying. "I believe you are right."

"I am sure I am right," the Princess answered positively.

Her loud, thick voice, and Mr. Strangworth's, low but clear, reached Ella distinctly, though she was moving away at the moment so as not to overhear. Immediately afterwards the whole party withdrew. The inspection of her lace had been perfunctory, and Ella suspected that this flying visit had been made for some other purpose. She retired to her sitting-room and sat down to review the experience. But she could think of nothing but those words that she had overheard and the looks she had surprised. She found herself attaching an importance to them which she could not have explained. It seemed as if the whole object of the visit had been to secure Mr. Strangworth's opinion in that matter about which the Princess was already quite sure. What was it?

Ella, vaguely disquieted, covered her face with her hands and suspended all thought in order to feel her way to an explanation. And, presently, into her empty mind there came the curious impression she had already experienced several times, that she was not alone, that someone was trying hard and vainly to communicate with her.

She looked up, and was startled but relieved to find that, on this occasion, she was not alone.

2

Left to themselves in the showroom, the Argus-Eyed sitting at the desk, and Miss Hildenborough leaning against it, came to the conclusion that there would be "nothin' more doin' that day. So many other things on made them slack." Just then, however, an elderly gentleman appeared in the doorway, stopped and glanced about as though hesitating, then decided to enter.

Miss Hildenborough went forward, instantly on the alert.

"Can I have the pleasure of showing you anything, sir?" she asked, with her most engaging professional smile.

The elderly gentleman looked at her as though he were surprised to be thus accosted. "Er—er," he stammered, "no. No, thank you." He shook his stick at the showroom, and asked it, "All well here, eh?"

Miss Hildenborough answered for the showroom that all was well there, and thanked him.

The elderly gentleman, reminded of her existence by her voice, looked at her again. "That's right," he jerked out. "Don't let me, er—I can manage."

Miss Hildenborough slowly returned to the desk, but she kept an eye on the elderly gentleman as though she suspected him of some nefarious design.

"Not much to look at, he isn't," she remarked to the Argus-Eyed.

"I don't know," that experienced lady rejoined. "Not what you call haristocratic, but he's got an air. Sorter looks as if the whole place belonged to him."

"He's at the Duchess's lace now," Miss Hildenborough remarked anxiously. "I hope it's all right."

"Why, he can't walk off with it."

"He's making his arrangements, p'raps. You never know. When I was at Fence's they always said 'Keep your eyes open.'"

"Fence's is a slop shop," the Argus-Eyed observed.

The elderly gentleman walked round the whole Show, sauntering. Arrived at the door of Ella's sitting-room, he ducked his head—with a view to making himself invisible perhaps—and, without knocking, cautiously opened the door and slipped in.

"Well, I never did!" Miss Hildenborough exclaimed. "What d'you think of that!"

"He might be a doctor," said the Argus-Eyed meditatively. "He looks like one of 'em swell ones not born a swell, but got there. They 'ave a sort of air. It's their intellects and the way they can order people about, the highest in the land."

"He did ask if we were all well here," Miss Hildenborough remembered. "But she doesn't look poorly, our Miss Banks."

"Oh, it's just a friendly visit," the Argus-Eyed comfortably opined.

Presently from the hall Beveridge was heard to order, "Tea for two."

"Well, if that's *him!*" Miss Hildenborough exclaimed excitedly.

"What 'a' you got now?" said the Argus-Eyed.

"You said there'd be tea for two in the sitting-room when *he* came!"

"So I did." She reflected a little. "So I did," she repeated.

Before more could be said, Mr. Julius Harkles appeared.

"Er, good-afternoon," he said, taking off his hat "most polite." "I am looking for the Duke of Castlefield Saye."

The Argus-Eyed surveyed him without a trace of expression in her face, and cautiously waited.

"I—er—thought I saw him come in here just now."

"A shortish gentleman, sir? Elderly? Grey hair? In a frock coat?"

"That is the Duke," Mr. Harkles replied, in a satisfied tone.

"The doctor, sir, come to inquire after the health of the house," the Argus-Eyed stated deliberately. "Unless he was one of the four gents that was with her Royal Highness just now?"

"I mean the gentleman who came in last, alone."

"The doctor, sir," the Argus-Eyed insisted.

The light went out of Mr. Harkles's countenance.

"Then I must have been mistaken," he said, half to himself, and turned to go, but recollected that there was another important point to be settled.

"It was her Royal Highness the Princess Anna, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, with a party privately," the Argus-Eyed promptly rejoined, then added in anticipation of further questions: "I didn't know any of 'em except her Royal Highness, not by sight."

Mr. Harkles, this time omitting ceremonial politeness, put on his hat and hurried away. He had collected capital enough for immediate use in conversation, even if there should be nothing left over in the way of two-twos to put together.

"Mrs. Pilbeam," said Miss Hildenborough solemnly—for thus was the Argus-Eyed called by rights, with the brevet rank of "Mrs." to add to her dignity. "Mrs. Pilbeam, why ever did you?"

"Because," the Argus-Eyed answered mysteriously. "And so will you, Miss Hildenborough, when you know as much as I

do. That sort of gent is one to be put off. He wants to know too much."

"But do you fancy it's the Duke?" Miss Hildenborough whispered.

"I'm morally sure it's the Duke," said the Argus-Eyed. "The moment I clapped eyes on him my mind misgave me it was Somebody. They've a way with 'em, and an Air! When you've come across that Air as often as I have, there's no mistaking it."

"Well, at any rate, it's not *him*, for the Duke's a married man," Miss Hildenborough decided.

"H'm," said the experienced Argus-Eyed. She opened the lid of the desk, got out her crochet, and set to work at a feverish rate.

"This I will say," she began, but stopped to count her stitches, "one, two, three, four, five, six—one too many"—she gave the thread a jerk and ripped out several. "Dash the thing!" she ejaculated.

"You were saying?" Miss Hildenborough reminded her.

"I was saying"—she pointed her crochet-needle at Miss Hildenborough—"I was saying, and you'd best make a note of it. If he"—she jerked her head towards the sitting-room door—"is by way of having it advertised that he's come to-day to honour us with his patronage, he'll put it about himself. There's ways. But for me and you, Miss Hildenborough—take my word for it, I *know*—least said soonest mended."

3

"Surprised to see me at this time of day, eh?" the Duke said when Ella looked up. "I was passing. Thought I might just as well, er—Tea, you know."

"Surprised and delighted," he might have said, Ella rose with such alacrity to meet him. At the mention of tea she made for the bell, but he interposed. "No. Allow me," and he rang.

"If you had come a little sooner, you would have found the Princess Anna here," she said.

"Er—I should," he answered. "Her second visit. Knew she'd come. Said so, if you remember."

"I wonder what she came for," Ella said meditatively.

"To see your lace," he suggested.

"She hardly looked at it," Ella answered, dissatisfied. "She looked more at me."

The Duke was looking hard at her too, and anxiously.

"Mr. Strangworth, too," she added.

"Strangworth—too," he repeated, deep in thought. "Well," he said at last, brightening and smiling, "I don't wonder!"

Over the teacups he adroitly drew from her in detail everything that had happened, with her own impressions thrown in. He listened, cup in one hand, saucer in the other, and every now and then he absently poured the tea from the cup to the saucer and back again. When specially interested in what was being said, or once he was well away on one of his long conversational rambles, he was apt, unconsciously, to set sundry small proprieties at nought with his fingers. Occasionally he took out his sleeve-links and changed them over or replaced them wrong side up, even put them in his pocket and went without. Sometimes he undid his tie and reknotted it, but not to the best advantage. He had also been known to prick patterns on any convenient article of furniture with his tiepin, and to pick the embroidery off a cushion or cut the cover up into strips with his penknife regardless. When so engaged he seemed to be intent only on what he was doing, but doubtless these five-finger exercises stimulated his mind and aided his halting syllables when he was trying to express himself. Thinking in pictures as a rule, he found it difficult to render his impression in words. Once he committed the enormity of pouring his tea backwards and forwards from his cup to his saucer in the presence of Majesty, to the consternation of his Duchess. But Majesty had a way of her own with chicken bones, it is said; certainly she had a sense of humour as well as a high regard for this particularly loyal prop to her throne; and, at any rate, she enjoyed the joke.

Ella, brought up in a small farmhouse, was accustomed to the performance, and watched it now without seeing anything peculiar in it, although some instinct of propriety prevented her from committing any such solecism. They were speaking of Paul McAllen Ray at the time. "Nice fellow, Paul," the Duke observed. "Friend of my boy Eustace. At school together. Evangelical. In season and out. Say anything to you?"

"He mentioned—God." She got the word out with difficulty. "Like the Boscs and Mr. Strangworth. Why do they? It

makes me so uncomfortable. They want me to feel myself a miserable sinner, and I can't."

"No. Mustn't feel yourself a miserable sinner. But they don't mean that. In their peculiar form of faith everyone is sinful. In the abstract. And must confess it. Can't be saved otherwise. Original sin, you know, and all that sort of thing. Good, kind people though. 'Hate the sin love the sinner' sort of thing. Morbid, though. Sin, sin, sin. Much too much of it."

He rose and began to walk up and down talking all the time, and Ella, accustomed to his monologues, listened without interrupting him. "Religion, if you like," he began. "I believe in God and I believe in the devil. Otherwise man. That's the way to read it. The devil *or* man? No! The ills which the craft and subtlety of the devil, *otherwise* man, worketh against us. Mankind, of course, men and women. That's it. Rightly put. Sin? No. Mistakes. We make mistakes. More or less reprehensible. And suffer for them. Punishment—marry the wrong woman." Long pause. "Or don't marry the right one. Must be in some sort a sin, that mistake, or why the punishment? For it is a punishment—when, because you have married the wrong woman——"

His eye rested on Ella, perusing her several perfections, and he stopped short.

"Ah, well," he sighed, and slipped from the topic. "So Janet Brastaby proffered her friendship? The woman of all others I should like you to have for a friend——" Again he stopped short. The attitude in which he had surprised her had suddenly recurred to him. He thought it betokened depression. "Dull, I'm afraid, eh?" he jerked out abruptly.

"With you here!" she exclaimed, smiling up at him.

"Thank you, my dear," he said, and set the subject aside for further consideration.

"People are beginning to leave town," he began afresh. "'Change the seasons, swiftly rolling.' All in due season. Seasonable equals certainty. There's rest for the mind in that. Don't like things out of season myself. Peaches. Pears. Asparagus. Never touch them till they come in in their own good time. Things out of season add to the confusion of life. Besides, where are we with nothing to look forward to? *The kindly fruits of the earth so as in due time we may enjoy them.* Strawberries at Christmas? No, thank you. Strawberries with the summer sunshine! We can't make the bitter wind less un-

kind, but we can make ourselves proof against it by looking forward. There is always a good time coming, but the good times are only at their best when they come in due season. I like to leave myself something to look forward to, even if it's only strawberries and—er"—he lowered his voice, and smiled naughtily—"and spring onions. I always have a little lone festival when the spring onions come in. I lunch in my own room. Low, vulgar taste. Have to shut myself up to eat them. My—er—family——" he broke off with a chuckle. "But of all the seasons give me the autumn," he resumed. "'The flying gold of the woodland floats through the air!' Tennyson. Ruskin called the expression a pathetic fallacy. Fallacy or no, it touches a chord! At Castlefield Saye, when the sycamores are shedding their leaves, goldest of gold, it always comes back—'The flying gold of the woodland.' Castlefield Saye in the autumn—!" He broke off abruptly, and relapsed into thought.

Home-sickness so far had troubled Ella but little, but now suddenly it clutched her by the heart. During the pause that ensued she felt the contrast between the rich and lovely picture the Duke had in his mind of his own surroundings at Castlefield Saye, and the sordid misery in which her own people hopelessly toiled and suffered at Pointz. She remembered her projects with a pang. Here she was living in luxury herself, helping her people, of course, but only with alms, when she should be clamouring for justice.

"Parliament will be rising soon," the Duke recommenced.

"And nothing done!" she exclaimed bitterly.

Surprised by her tone, he halted and looked at her inquiringly. She seized the opportunity.

"It must be splendid to be in Parliament, to have power, but why isn't it more used?" she said.

"For what purpose?" he asked. "They're always hard at it. At something."

"Not at anything worth doing, then," she remarked, "since so little good is done."

"That your view of it? Well, I can't quarrel with it exactly. One might almost say, 'Now all are for a party and none are for the State.' When party interests are at stake, the State is let very much go hang."

"The people are always let go hang," she said.

"What are you thinking of, my dear?" he asked, and sat down.

"Of the difference between rich and poor," she answered passionately; "of the misery I have seen,—the injustice. My peasant blood boils when I think——"

"Ah! Your peasant blood!" he ejaculated. "Yes. Of course. Your—er—peasant blood—is at war with us? You hate—er—the class to which I belong?"

"The *class,* naturally," she said, the rest expressed in her eyes.

"Thank you." He sighed. "Of course. I understand. Not persons. The collective mind of the class. And its outcome. Natural, I suppose. You say you have seen the sufferings of the poor?"

"I have experienced the awful needless sufferings of the poor," she answered simply; "endless toil and slow starvation."

"Do you mean to say that *you* experienced—hadn't always enough to eat?" Evidently he was shocked.

"There was seldom enough to eat," she answered evasively; "and never enough of the right kind of food to keep a man's strength up. My poor father—I have seen him totter home from work day after day, exhausted. My poor stepmother, too, always toiling, exhausted. And the labourers, their wives, and, oh! most agonising of all, the children—the poor wee mites!"

"But you? You? Did *you* go hungry?" He gasped the words out painfully.

"Oh, my work was light and sedentary," she fenced. "I had no great appetite to make me hungry."

He resumed his sentry-go up and down the room, his step leisurely; but with his tell-tale fingers he tormented a button of his waistcoat until he pulled it off, and once or twice he muttered: "Not enough to eat. Good God! There—next door to me."

Ella flashed a look of triumph after him when his back was turned. She had made him feel! She had brought it home to him! Give her the chance, and she would make them all feel! The greedy, selfish, idle rich, oppressors of the poor.

"You have all you want now?" he asked her at last, abruptly. "No wish ungratified? Supposing——" His countenance cleared, and he sat down. "Good fairies, eh? They're not all dead. If you were offered one wish, Ella, now, I wonder, what would be the wish of your heart?" His object was to relieve his feelings by giving her some great immediate gratification, and he had in his mind's eye a vast collection of things for

which women long, including a toy terrier, a steam yacht, and a tiara of diamonds. "Ask for the possible, of course," he added, beaming. "What do you want?"

"A liberal living wage for every worker," she answered instantly.

"Bedrock, that!" he exclaimed, disconcerted.

"*Please?*" she asked.

"Bedrock? *You,* in this instance. The deep down *you,* underlying all the rest of you. It's there, in all of us, the bedrock upon which our characters are built. But it doesn't often show. Too much superstructure. When it does show—at odd times—grip it, and you'll know your man." He reflected a moment. "Queer though. For a girl," he said.

"Is it, sir? For a workgirl?"

"You did not ask for the possible," he reproached her.

"Is that so, sir? Your wand is powerful. That affair of our Commons——?"

"Yes, that was iniquitous," he conceded. "I've often thought I'd look into the land question. And I will."

"Will you?" Ella brightened. "You could do so much!"

"Not so very much, but something perhaps. As it is I do what I can on my own estates."

"I know. But think of Pointz."

"Pointz is a blot."

He left her upon that, abruptly, as usual; but he left her satisfied.

The Duke's sagacity was not at fault. He had seen the conglomerate bedrock of Ella's character, her compassionate rage against tyranny and injustice, her passionate desire to save suffering, to be a helper of the helpless. But he knew nothing of the superstructure with which this fine foundation was being encumbered, a heavy superstructure calculated to sink it, or, at all events, too unfortunately solid to be demolished by anything less terrible than an earthquake; nor did either of them perceive that the Powers of Light and Darkness were fighting for her soul, and that the earthquake was rendered inevitable by the shock of their final encounter.

CHAPTER VII

ELLA DEALS WITH A FRIEND AND OUSTS AN ENEMY

1

SUMMER was at its height and the weather was sultry. Ella began to pine for fresh air. She dreamed of the pine-scented forests at home, of the wind-swept open spaces, the sand-dunes and the rock-strewn shore; the sea gently heaving, little waves rippling in and breaking with just commotion enough to fill the ear murmurously; light airs stirring, sweet, pure airs, life-giving, health in them, strength in them—oh! Ella would gasp for a breath, but she never flinched from her task, never thought how easily she might realise her dream if she chose. She persuaded herself that the dream was refreshment enough, and allowed herself no vain longings for change. The sultry afternoons, when she was keeping shop alone at the tea-hour, saw her sitting at work in the corner bay, her needle steadily plied or her bobbins flying, her whole attention apparently concentrated on what she was doing, but only apparently. The work was done mechanically; her spirit roved. And always roved home—to Red Rose Farm, to the breezy heights of Castlefield Saye, to the lush meadows, flower-scented, that girdled Pratt's Place, or to the woods—the pine woods—odorous, murmurous, mysterious, a fairyland, where, for miles, down the dusky glades, the flying hoofs of a galloping horse could be heard, a muffled thudding, approaching—yes, always approaching.

One day he came so near, so near,—then stopped short. Had he arrived? With a catch in her breath and her hand on her heart she looked up, the dream all reality, the reality a dream—a nightmare dream that had caught her away from her lattice at Red Rose Farm and was holding her fast between great casements covered with black gauze through which she looked out on houses, high houses and irregular, whose doors were always shut, from whose lace-screened windows no friendly face ever looked out.

"Did I startle you? Pray forgive me!"

Col Drindon, only.

Ella looked at him, bewildered, like one roughly awakened.

The poet in him divined the dreamer in this surprising young woman, hitherto, to all outward seeming, so only practical. A deep dreamer, too. But whence came she with her hand on her heart and a catch in her breath, and that radiance?

The radiance cleared to recognition.

"I am afraid I startled you," he repeated.

"I did not hear you come, that was all," she replied.

"You were not here," he accused her.

"I was not asleep," she fenced. "Though it would not have been surprising if I had been this sultry afternoon."

"I wish I knew where you were!" he exclaimed. If she would only tell him that, he thought the problem which was Ella would be solved.

She leant back in her chair languidly.

"You ought not to stick it out here on such days as this," he ventured.

"Oh, I'm all right," she said.

"I wish you would tell me what you were dreaming about just now!"

"Why not?" she answered, smiling up at him. "I dreamt I heard somebody coming, and opened my eyes, and there were you."

"I see," he said. "You heard somebody coming, and it was only me." He looked at her shrewdly, but she made no sign. "Are you very candid or very deep, I wonder?"

"There is no need for you to know," she said, laughingly.

"I thought we were friends," he complained.

"Friendship is founded on faith," she said, "and hedged about by delicacy. To intrude is to be offensive; to question is to intrude."

"Clever. But should a friend be put off with sententious platitudes for merely asking a civil question? Is it kind?"

"Are you kind?" she asked.

"You adroitly shift the responsibility," he said.

" 'Bear ye one another's burdens,' " she rejoined.

He sighed and shook his head. "We are talking great nonsense," he said.

"It is ninety in the shade," she reminded him.

They broke into smiles.

"I get no further," he recommenced, running his fingers up through his thick fair hair, a despairing gesture.

"Where are you trying to go?"

"To your heart," he answered, bowing with his hand on his own.

"Surely, as a friend you are already there, enshrined?"

"But I object to a little shrine in a corner," he grumbled. "I want to pervade the whole structure and oust the other fellow."

"Who may he be, if you please?"

He answered theatrically: "He whose fancied step brought the radiance to your face which went out at sight of me, when your disappointed eyes betrayed the unutterable truth—that I—was not—the man!"

"You are tenacious," she said.

"How?" he asked, dropping his pose.

"You have worked back to the point of departure."

He stood, right arm akimbo, hat and stick in his left hand, tapping his shoe.

"Your ready wit apprehends better than you know," he said at last; but it was he who was apprehending better than he knew.

She smiled provocatively.

He looked round for a seat, but the only other one had a pile of lace on it. "You might have a spare chair here," he said plaintively, easing one foot by resting on the other.

"I should have no use for it, and it would be in my way," she teased.

"*I* should have great use for it just now," he assured her. "Patent-leather shoes begin to assert themselves aggressively when the thermometer is ninety in the shade, and I put on my shiniest and tightest to do you honour——"

"To waste my time," she amended.

"Oh, come now, Miss Ella!"

"Well, what *are* you doing here? What is your business?"

He rubbed the brim of his hat up and down his nose, and looked at her reflectively.

"My business," he began. "You will allow that a man can choose what shall be his business in life?"

"I allow that," she answered, toying with the bobbins on her lace-pillow.

"My business, the business that brought me here to-day, and will bring me again and again until it is crowned with success, or ends in death, has you for its object," he said.

"Poetry," she interjected.

"The occasion warrants it," he rejoined. "As I was dressing this morning, I thought of you shut up here this grilling weather all day long, hard at work. I thought of the incessant strain it must be to attend on so many people; of the intervals when you are at your desk, or plying your needle, or making your bobbins fly, instead of resting; and I perceived that even your splendid health could not stand it much longer without being impaired. You must have fresh air . . . my beautiful! You must come out every day. Will you? With me? Let me take you for a drive."

Ella, glancing out of the window, saw a smart pair of dapple-greys, with a smart groom at their heads, and a smart mail-phaeton in tow, standing at her door. At the same time she saw another carriage with a lady in it drive by. The lady also saw the greys, and, jumping up, called to her coachman. Her carriage returned and pulled up behind the greys.

"The police-lady has just arrived to take you up," Ella quietly observed.

"Police-lady—what do you mean?" he exclaimed.

"The police-lady who took you in charge the other day."

He looked round desperately. "'Hide me, hide me, Thora of Rimol,'" he implored.

An impulse, half mischievous, half maternal protection, wholly feminine, urged her to thwart the police-lady. "My sitting-room!" she cried.

He made a dash for the door on the tips of his pointed toes, coat-tails flying, hat and stick held up, and disappeared just as Lady Ballard and Sarb entered the showroom. Ella, convulsed with laughter, bent over her bobbins to hide her face. There was no possibility of concealment in the big open room, but Lady Ballard and Sarb nipped about searching every corner. Discovering Ella at last, she marched up to her, and burst out: "Col Drindon's carriage is at your door."

Slowly Ella raised her head and looked at her, slowly she put her pillow down, slowly she rose and waited. Anything more exasperating to an angry woman than this calculated deliberation cannot be imagined.

"Where is he?" the irate lady demanded.

Ella looked around the room. "He was here just now," she said coolly.

"Where did he go?"

"Really!" Ella protested. "People come and go all day long.

The more the better for my business. But where they come from and where they go to is not my business. I keep no tally of their movements."

"His carriage is at your door."

Ella looked out of the window. "So it is," she said. "It seems to be waiting. Perhaps he expected your ladyship."

Something in the way she spoke put her ladyship on the defensive. "No. Why should he expect me?" she snapped.

Ella, with a little ambiguous smile, looked her straight in the face and slightly shrugged her shoulders.

Lady Ballard and Sarb became alarmed, she was ready to cringe. "You see," she said. "I am annoyed——"

Ella looked amused.

"So would you be," Lady Ballard and Sarb protested. "I have to be at Hurlingham this afternoon. I particularly wanted a man. I cannot go without a man. My—my husband is playing, don't you see. Col Drindon promised to take me and didn't come. I've been waiting hours. I might have got someone else to take me, but I asked him because—oh, because I—we—are by way of looking after him, don't you know. His mother asked us. He is—he's only a boy."

It seemed to Ella that the lady herself was only an irresponsible girl, playing a silly game of boy and girl. Ella was vexed to have been drawn into it, but she was determined not to give that nice boy away.

"You cannot wonder that I am put out," her ladyship rattled on with a little stamp. "What am I to do?"

Ella stood mute.

"You don't care!"

Ella did not care.

"Why don't you say something? Why don't you advise?"

"I cannot think of anything to say," Ella answered. "And how am I to advise? I only know what I should do myself."

"What would you do?"

"I should give up Hurlingham, go home, get into a nice, fresh, cool tea-gown, order tea or iced coffee or something, and luxuriate with a fan and a book until I was obliged to do something else."

"Could you—alone?" Lady Ballard and Sarb cried incredulously.

"Never less alone than when alone," Ella replied.

Question and answer revealed the speakers. Lady Ballard

and Sarb tapped the floor with her foot impatiently. She had had everything she wanted all her life, and now she wanted Col Drindon, and because she wanted him and had had everything she wanted all her life, she must have him, nothing else would suffice.

"I hate you!" she cried. "I hate everybody. What is the use of a fan and a book!" She burst into tears.

Ella was moved to do something for her. "You are overwrought," she said. "The heat is oppressive. Let me get you some tea. You can't show yourself like that. Come and be quiet for a little. It will do you good. Come! If anybody sees you——"

Lady Ballard and Sarb, alive to this danger, followed her submissively. As they crossed the hall Ella ordered Beveridge to send them tea to the library.

The library was the coolest room in the house. Lady Alicia had loved comfort first and after that books; the comfort of the furnishments was accordingly more striking than the collection of books. Everything was just as she had left it. Ella used the room principally to see people in whom she did not care to admit to the intimacy of her own private sitting-room; but she had a pious respect for the things her predecessor had valued, and the room was scrupulously cared for.

Lady Ballard and Sarb threw herself into an easychair, sniffed, and looked about her curiously, her volatile little mind already distracted. "You are very comfortably lodged here," she said.

"I have everything I want," Ella answered indifferently. She was wondering if Col had made his escape.

"I should think so!" her ladyship exclaimed. "Why, Billy doesn't give me half so good a house, and I have to put up with him in it too."

"Your husband!" Ella was shocked.

Lady Ballard and Sarb, in the elegant language of her set, was as sharp as they make 'em. Ella's tone gave her Ella's views on the matrimonial question. She expected "that sort of person" to be either "impossible" or "puritanical." The latter term implied "cant" and "dissent." She set the lace-girl down as puritanical, and the discovery reassured her. Col wouldn't have a look in with that sort of person. Much relieved, she hastened to adapt herself, as was her wont when she found herself with puritanical people, and thought it worth while.

The entrance of a maid with tea passed off that slip about her husband.

"Oh, how nice!" she cried, clapping her hands as the maid made a pretty display with Lady Alicia's plate and china and an appétising variety of eatables. "Tea is really all I want. You dear, you are too kind! I am not very strong, and I've been helping my good man with letters and things all the morning"—she hadn't spoken to him for a week. "Men are so helpless, aren't they? I don't know what on earth Billy would do without me, the dear thing! It's a bit of a strain, but I'm glad I am able to help him."

She rested her powers of invention upon this, erroneously supposing that it had taken the trick, and attacked the eatables with appetite. Ella silently ministered to her wants and let her chatter. She made her out to be an insincere, greedy, exacting little fool.

They separated on the doorstep, effusively on Lady Ballard and Sarb's part. She called Ella the dearest thing in the world and vowed eternal friendship. Col Drindon's carriage was round the corner at the moment, and they both congratulated themselves that it had gone.

Ella supposed that he also had gone, but she found him in her sitting-room, comfortably ensconced in an easychair, reading one of her books.

"Still here!" she exclaimed in a tone of annoyance.

"Hospitable!" he remonstrated, jumping up. "I thought you were never coming."

"I thought so too," she said. "Why did you play the lady false?"

"*I* play her false?" He crimsoned to the roots of his hair.

"Why didn't you take her to Hurlingham as you had promised?"

"Take her to Hurlingham? There's nothing going on at Hurlingham to-day."

"Oh!" said Ella.

"The silly little fool," he continued, "to lie like that! Why, everybody knows this isn't a Hurlingham day. She pesters me to death."

"She says you are only a boy, and your mother asked them to look after you."

"I am thirty, and my mother died when I was born," he groaned. "What a fool I was—I'll tell you. I did at one

time—— But there! Could any man stand a woman long who can't even lie decently?"

"I see. You would applaud a successful lie."

"I don't applaud anything she does. I'm sick of her. You've cured me forever of that sort of thing."

Ella stood looking at him, frowning and puzzled. "What sort of thing?" she demanded. "I don't understand."

"You'll find an explanation in any vulgar novel of the day."

"I don't expect to find any vulgar-novel people among my acquaintances," she rejoined. "You go on like a pair of silly children, you and your vulgar-novel person. I've no patience with either of you. You've wasted my whole afternoon. I've not finished my work, and the light is gone."

"Come for a drive, do!" he coaxed eagerly, "and let's put all this away for ever. It's all over, really. Help me to forget. Come for a drive, do!"

"I am going for a drive."

His face lighted up. "Now that is nice of you," he said.

"I am going alone."

He changed countenance. "My carriage is at your disposal," he answered stiffly.

"Thank you, my own is ready." She spoke without emphasis, rather as if she were thinking of something else. Heart-sickness had come upon her; her impulse was to fly.

A sudden mad jealousy blazed up in Col. How did she come to have a carriage? She could not keep that sort of thing up on lace! Other fellows' insinuations with regard to her position beset him. There was some one in the background then!

"And I respected you!" he flung at her in his rage and pain.

"I have done nothing to forfeit your respect!" she flashed back—and swept from the room, very much the Winged Victory.

He suffered a revulsion of feeling. Jealousy was stifled by remorse. The Winged Victory, his Beautiful, and he had insulted her! He cursed himself, he cursed Maud Ballard and Sarb. It was all her fault, the little beast! No wonder Ella was disgusted! He compared the two, he compared their surroundings—Maud's dim room, cushioned, curtained, scented; the expression of her sensual self—and this! Open, light, airy, simple; the expression of a busy, chaste, well-ordered life. He thought of Ella at work, her sweet seriousness, her sympathetic aloofness, as of an angel whose heart could be touched, whose person was sacred.

"I have done nothing to forfeit your respect."

He was damned if he didn't believe her! He would stake his life that anything she had she had come by honestly. And he had insulted her! Always he came back to that. How cowardly! How low!

He sat down at the writing-table and scribbled a letter, a feverish outpouring, all self-abasement and passionate regret. The effort calmed him. But the letter would not do. He tore it up and cast the fragments into the waste-paper basket.

On the way home he fell in with Paul McAllen Ray. They walked on together, Paul, at peace and aglow, yearning to share his happiness with his friend, talking persuasively. They and two workmen were stopped at a crossing by a block in the traffic. When they had passed on, one of the workmen asked his companion, in a significant tone, as of one surprised by an astonishing portent: "I say, Dick, did ye 'ear what that there young swell was talkin' about to t'other, serious?"

"Gawd!" His companion answered in the same tone, laconically.

Paul talked of the straight and narrow gate; of Love Divine; of the more abundant life; of the satisfaction, the uplifting, the glorious exultation of the Twice Born. The moment was well chosen.

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Meanwhile in Ella's sitting-room, the meek Mrs. Pounce, a little drab woman in black, was gloating ghoulishly over Ella's waste-paper basket, collecting the fragments of that unfortunate letter.

CHAPTER VIII

VARIOUS CHARACTERS SHOW THEIR COLOURS

1

THE great sensation of the season happened towards its close and the Duke of Castlefield Saye was the hero of it, a fact which made the sensation all the greater, for the Duke of Castlefield Saye had never before created a sensation of any kind.

For this reason, on the principle that happy is the State which has no history, he was supposed to be a happy man. As Society saw him, he might well have been. He had good health, great

wealth, personal popularity, the respect of all who knew him; he was the husband of an amiable lady with whom he had always lived on excellent terms; he was the father of a charming daughter and two eminently satisfactory sons, between whom and himself there existed the most cordial affection; and he was honoured by the confidence and esteem of his sovereign Lady. The Duke should have been a happy man; but he was not. He had had his moments, of course; no man in his position could fail of that much. And always his amiable disposition made little pleasures for itself out of little things—spring onions, for instance. But for him happiness and pleasure alike had the drawback which attends the consumption of spring onions; the attitude of his mind effected a kind of chemical change which made things disagreeable in the after-taste, however palatable they might have been at the time.

Yet few would have suspected that he was not happy, for the Duke was heroic. To be cheerful to all outward seeming when one is feeling the reverse, is a form of heroism deserving of the highest praise; a rare form, only to be practised by the possessor of many estimable qualities, among which unselfish consideration for the comfort of others is supreme. This form of heroism was the greater credit to the Duke because he was naturally an irritable man and had had to cultivate equanimity by assiduous self-restraint.

His melancholy had come upon him gradually as his experience of life matured, and he made for himself the ever-recurring discovery, new to all of us, that material advantages do not make heaven upon earth, that the joys to be obtained by wealth, position, and power are too transient to be more than momentarily satisfying, and are soon outgrown, since custom stales the appetite. Comparing his own state with that of the majority of his fellow-creatures, he had early realised that many who had none of his privileges were essentially better off. There was always a goal in front of them, a pleasant want to be satisfied with an effort. To him the necessity for effort was lacking, and with it the stimulus to action which makes for the joy of attainment. He had a vague idea that no man need be without a special object in life, he knew that such an object buoys a man up, and he had kept the finding of such an object for himself in view, but had not as yet found time to do more. Details connected with the duties of his position had to be attended to, and to these he honourably gave his best attention.

He might with justice have called himself a busy man, and such business as his has its own importance; many lives would have been disarranged and much inconvenience entailed had he neglected it; but it was the business of a system of a great machine which he had not set in motion and could not control. It controlled him. He was the tool of a machine which was working with results that he knew to be bad in many ways; in great measure, an ineffectual machine, into the defective parts of which he meant to look but never did, to any purpose. Besides, his part in the working of the machine was obligatory, and obligatory work is not soul-satisfying, as an object in life peculiar to himself would have been.

And he missed more than the stimulus of a definite personal object in life, for he had missed the immediate source of conscious happiness, close congenial companionship. His wife was in no sense a companion for a man of his ability, for the Duke was no fool. Wide tracts of knowledge and thought lay between his halting words. His mind visualised the whole landscape of his subject, his tongue leapt from point to point; but to one who knew him and could also visualise the subject, the gaps were easily filled in. To the mind that was quick enough to leap with his from point to point, he was never incoherent.

A companionable wife would have been a solace, but his passion was paternity, and his children had disappointed him. He had expected much of them, and nothing had come. His daughter was a pretty piece of pink and white china, fragile and useless, his sons purposeless. Nice fellows but futile. Living in the present, only taking thought of the morrow with a view to prevent misadventure and make it pleasant for themselves. Their merit lay in their scrupulous objection to any pleasure they might secure for themselves at other people's expense. They were honourable gentlemen. But the Duke had seen other men's sons strong swimmers in the tide of life, born ready equipped, taking to the water fearlessly like ducks and striking out for themselves, while his own remained mere paddlers, destitute of enterprise, and his paternal pride was hurt. Heredity was a pet study of his, and he had observed that bad traits came out worse in the next generation. His wife was foolish, his daughter a fool. He hesitated in his speech, Eustace stuttered; he had direct intentions but procrastinated, Melton, the hope of his house, was a drifter. These observations lowered him in his own estimation as a father. He needed another

kind of child, one to be proud of; but another kind of child would require another kind of mother, and his initial mistake must stand. He had not chosen the right woman to produce the child he would have gloried to have.

So, though on good terms with everyone he cared about, and in intimate touch with some, there had always somehow been absent from his friendships the deeper strain of sympathetic understanding which fills the heart and brings the finer feelings into play, those feelings upon the release of which happiness depends. Therefore the Duke was not a happy man. His heart had been homeless, and he had been lonely all his life. Thus, driven into the wilderness, where a man must of necessity move in an orbit of his own or never move at all, related to yet not in touch even with his nearest, he had not felt their conventions binding upon him, and had grown careless of them, and, in one sense, an "outsider"—though that was not the word used to express his divagations. The powerful possessor of a rich duchy cannot be an "outsider" in the modern acceptation of the term, yet he may be eccentric; and eccentric his contemporaries ruled him. He was outside the common orbit.

But in these days there were signs apparent of a change in his attitude towards things in general. The tinge of melancholy, which had been the characteristic expression of his face when in repose, was less often perceptible now than it had been since his early manhood, and there was a buoyancy in his gait which had made his irreverent contemporaries remark among themselves that "Old Ninny looks as if he'd taken a new lease of life." The effect of this revival showed in his dress, which had long been peculiar, but now suddenly conformed to usage, as if the aberration of taste from which he suffered had passed off and left him normal. The same irreverent personages, his contemporaries, said he was disguising himself as a gentleman, and they wouldn't have known him. For whereas his suits had been variegated, and his favourite colours flamboyant, he now turned himself out as quietly and decorously dressed as any prosperous shopwalker.

"He's not trying to make himself look younger, at all events," was Mr. Harkles's opinion, founded on the fact that there was no "make-up" in the Duke's new departure. Failing this clue, Mr. Harkles was at a loss. Not so, however, the younger generation. Fastidiousness in cut and cloth is expensive, and knowing that a lady in question ran up their own tailors' bills

most surely, they put two-and-two together with the confidence of youth, and Col Drindon for *Leit Motif* gave the Duke—

"New Love. New life.
We love but while we may."

The Duke had not been at all an important kind of a duke, and he knew it. He voted occasionally in the House of Lords, but, like the rest of his family, he had never laid himself out to do anything else publicly for the State. He had acquiesced in, by not differing from, the Tory attitude on the subject of domestic legislation, and had at one time agreed that public discussions on the conditions of the working-classes which show that they do not always have within their reach everything that they ought to have to make life bearable, only tend to provoke futile discontent, and were therefore demoralising.

But of late the Duke's attendances in the House of Lords had become frequent, and he had taken a definite line—an erratic line, as it seemed to his colleagues—for he could no longer be relied upon as a party man in domestic affairs. He gave out that he meant to vote as his conscience directed, and, as might have been feared, this radical intention resulted in the support of radical measures. "Betterment" was his word at first, and from that he passed on to "Raising the Standard of Comfort all Round." Here he rested awhile, gathering himself together for a spring—a spring, which, when it did come, dumbfounded the House and told on the country like an electric shock. On the occasion he surpassed the possible in imagery. He declared that it was true that his own Chamber was effete, a hulk in stagnant water, anchored fore and aft to self-interest, rotting where it lay, and daily becoming more incapable of putting out to sea on high adventure bent, for the Glory of God and the Good of Mankind. They were indeed and unfortunately, the "governing class," the class which, as had been truly said (he quoted from memory), "always affects to be in power, even when it is out of office, and often contrives, by its command of the press, its influence in finance, and its prestige in society, to dictate foreign policy and what shall or shall not be done at home." The country had been bluffed into a lazy acquiescence in its management—or rather mismanagement of affairs. He insisted on calling it mismanagement, seeing that still, in this wealthiest of nations, seventy-five per cent. of the

population were insufficiently housed, clothed, and fed. A deaf ear was turned to their cries for help, their piteous appeals for justice.

"For these reasons," he concluded, "I take my stand. I throw in my lot with the workers whose aim is to do as they would be done by. My interests shall be the interests of the whole community. Henceforth, I follow the banner of the Sociocrat, the banner gloriously emblazoned with the Sacred name of Him who lived and died to show men how to live and die. I give you the motto and watchword of the Sociocrat, my motto and watchword henceforth, the motto and watchword of peace and progress, the open sesame to the more abundant life. My lords, I give you, CHRIST AND CO-OPERATION, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL."

2

Then was the big sensation, national and international! The Duke, who had never been an important Duke, had suddenly become an important man. That he, a great territorial magnate, should trample on the standard of his caste and throw in his lot with the common herd, the Socialistic crew, wreckers of the constitution, baseborn despoilers, fortune-hunting for themselves!—Aristocracy was outraged, the clergy scandalised. One Bishop, indeed, did catch at the meaning of "Sociocrat," and boldly ventured to quote a "Divine Example," but he was howled down.

The sensation spread abroad. Democratic France clapped hands, pleasantly excited. The Aristocracy of Italy, Spain, and Portugal were shocked, but their starving peoples made no sign; they never heard of the Event. Paternal Russia, in a panic, with a pack of official wolves, indiscriminately herded hundreds of her children into prison like sheep, and then made short work of the innocents by increasing the rigours of paternal discipline; while the Teutonic nations, split in two, high against low, writhed on the one hand, and, on the other, silently expressed the hallelujahs it was hardly wise to utter. Only in America was the Event not taken seriously by the upper or Trustful class; their own whiphand being unthreatened, their money was safe, and there being no money in this, it did not matter; therefore their attitude was detached and impersonal, but they looked on with interest, as at an amusing game, and

exercised their subtle incisive wit on the principals with telling brevity, in phrases which cut clean home to the humour of the Event.

But nowhere were the cowed masses, accustomed to be tricked, more than momentarily jubilant. They were not unhopeful, because "hope springs eternal" and is the moral bread of life; but they were suspicious, and not for putting their faith in princes and promises. They had lost things that way before.

To the Land and Leisure Club, which only lives conversationally on excitement, the sensation was a boon. The waning season, when all the usual sources were pretty well exhausted, was always a dry time, and this was water to the desert of their wit. The Lotus Eaters were not for disturbing themselves. They concluded comfortably that one swallow does not make a summer. But the scaremongers were out on business, and would not leave it at that. They said that one swallow was always a harbinger with flocks to follow, and no mistake about the summer they were after. Also, they said, the Duke was not a bird of passage anyway; more likely a stormy petrel disguised as a dove, with his olive branch and his peace on earth and good-will towards men, and all his whole show of damned unworkable rot. And then they got on the thin end of the wedge and stayed there in great discomfort, loudly insisting on the danger of the position, until even the Lotus Eaters were roused from their dreamful ease by the clamour, for whole minutes at a time.

But it was not genuinely feared that the Duke could do much harm, or would go beyond words.

"There isn't enough policy in him, and it's policy makes the mare to go in his shop," The O'Haleron said, demurely, accusing their working system from the point of view of his patriotism; but they did not understand that "policy" means "trickery" in Irish-English, and agreed with what they supposed he meant, that "there was no driving-power in the Duke." "Driving-power" being the only measure of force which they understood and counted upon, they rashly hugged the conclusion as a satisfactory safeguard, without perceiving that if the Duke had no "driving-power," he might have an even stronger quality to effect his purpose. Mankind may be intellectually driven in tens, but it is only by the heart that you can lead them; get a grip of their hearts, and they follow in tens

of thousands. The Duke had always made his way in the world by means of his hold on the hearts of mankind.

The stream of the youngsters' talk at the Club was a babbling brook, shallow and noisy, and little frequented by the grey-heads. They had their own water further on, secluded and quiet, but not much deeper, except in flood times. They called such times "A crisis." Little can be said for the quality of the catch in either case—judging by results. The youngsters baited with optimism, and anything unsatisfactory on the hook they cast aside as "all rot"; the grey-heads with pessimism, and filled their creels with portents of disaster which kept them in a chronic state of "The country is going to the dogs, sir!" In the case of "Old Ninny's" divagation, however, they fished for the cause rather than the effect. A clue which they were by way of following up, he had given them himself in one of his periodical excursions into the mysteries of sex and heredity. In an informal debate with some of his compeers at the Club, he had propounded and developed the theory that "Intellectually the functions of the sexes are reversed, it being the woman who fertilises the mind of man." This bore fruit after the Event as a suggestion, and the question was, "Who is the woman?"

Mr. Harkles was present at the discussion. He came under the wing of Lord Terry de Beach on this occasion. He was always welcome to their councils of the kind, his passport being his own grey head and remarkable aptitude when it came to putting two-and-two together.

Mr. Harkles, at this time, was the victim of a new whimsey of Lord Terry's, and he arrived in a state of depression. Lord Terry himself, kept on the rack between his dread of the hell and his disinclination for the heaven of the churches, was resting from controversy and seeking solace in good works. Just then he was by way of converting Mr. Harkles by means of the Bible and bad language. The Bible he made Mr. Harkles read aloud to him by the hour together, and the bad language he used to pepper his comments. Besides being a good work, the discovery of this new and ingenious way of tormenting Mr. Harkles, fed Lord Terry's sense of humour and was a congenial relaxation. But he might as well have tried to convert a tailor's block. In fact, the tailor's block in Mr. Harkles was triumphant, for underneath the stream of oaths and subtle sarcasms used by Lord Terry to express his concern for the soul of his Julius, Mr. Harkles in the undercurrent of his thoughts was

busy devising an appropriate suit to wear at these exercises. Unfortunately, hoping that each occasion would be the last, he had hesitated to carry out his design. An appropriate suit, something not exactly ecclesiastical but sombre and dignified, would have carried him like a life-belt successfully through the ordeal; as it was, in his worldly attire he floundered; hence his depression.

But when the question was asked: "Who is the woman?" Mr. Harkles revived. He had kept a card up his sleeve to play at just such a crisis, and now he produced it. "The woman," he said solemnly, "is the Lace Girl."

"What!" croaked Lord Terry in his corncrake voice. "The 'Winged Victory'? I don't believe it!"

But the company insisted on hearing the evidence. Then Mr. Harkles told his story; untruthfully with regard to any detail that would have compromised himself. He did not say he had stalked the Duke; he said he was going to the Corner House for a piece of lace he intended as a present to a lady, and happened to see the Duke in front of him entering—*furtively.*

"How—furtively?" Mr. Strangworth asked, sternly.

Mr. Harkles hedged. "He was nowhere to be seen when I got there. I asked the woman at the desk. She said it was not the Duke. It was the doctor. I believed my own eyes."

But Lord Terry was grumpy and threw cold water on his Julius's lively inferences. Also he was on the alert to protect one of his own caste by thwarting the *parvenu* spy. "Isn't like old Ninny," he averred. "Too damned cautious. Always has been. Unless, of course, Good Gracious sent him to spere. She's one to keep her eyes on what's doin', and the girl's her *protégée.* More likely it was a damned doctor. Quaffoine's much the same figure as the Duke. I've mistaken him myself for the Duke more'n once. Likely fellow too. Nuts on pretty patients. Good chap too. I've known him give his best attention to many a poor, ugly little actress who couldn't have paid him a sou if he'd wanted one. I'll bet the woman told the truth, and it was Quaffoine you saw, my Julius. What do you say, Strangworth?"

But Mr. Strangworth had reason to think that the woman had not spoken the truth. "Even if it were the Duke, what is there in it?" he said evasively. "It seems to me that you are trying to bring an imputation against the Duke, Mr. Harkles?"

Mr. Harkles smiled meaningly. "The Winged Victory is said to be of a pretty wit, Mr. Strangworth," he said. "You may have some knowledge of that yourself. Of her personal appearance——"

Lord Terry lapsed into sin at this, and smacked his lips.

Mr. Harkles, with a shrug, conveyed to the rest of the group all that he intended. "I think the question was," he said, "Has the Duke been influenced by a woman in the direction he has lately taken? The Lace Girl is a girl of the people. She would not be called the Winged Victory for nothing. She started well-equipped in mind, person, and patronage, and she has shown herself capable. She has made her mark distinctly. She might be the councillor of kings, let alone of a Duke. These women often are. Mr. Strangworth could name all the women famous for beauty who have ever lived, and could not deny that every one of them—I don't say they were abandoned, they were too clever for that. But a woman in the position of this girl, and ambitious of power, has always a price to pay for it."

The Grey-heads agreed. Mr. Strangworth walked out of the room. Mr. Harkles inwardly scored a success to himself. But Lord Terry de Beach, who could never let his Julius be in peace, discounted his score with an icy douche.

"You've not proved that it was the Duke," he croaked sarcastically. "It's not the sort of way he'd do a thing like that. I'll bet my buttons it was Quaffoine! What do you say, gentlemen?"

The gentlemen were obliged to admit that there was a doubt. But rumour chuckled. Here was a fine something to fly about with!

On the night of the tremendous utterance the Duke appeared in Ella's sitting-room. No one seeing him then, a rather commonplace-looking gentleman, with a jerky manner and nothing specially distinctive about him or attractive until he smiled, would have suspected him of having just set the wires in motion with matter for a world-wide sensation.

He found Ella idly walking up and down the room. She was always alone in the evening, but it had only lately occurred to him that she might be lonesome.

"I happened to be passing and just dropped in for a moment—for a moment, you know," he said (his invariable formula), holding her hand and looking at her with an examining gaze; "on my way from—er—yes."

"I am so glad," she said. "You have time to sit down, I hope."

"There is a silly saying," he rejoined, settling himself in his favourite chair, and beginning to fidget with his watchguard; "a silly saying, 'So glad you're glad I'm glad.' Ever hear it? Music Hall sort of thing. I probably got it in some such place."

"Was your Grace ever in any such place?" Ella asked, smiling sceptically.

"Oh, yes, for my sins! I went everywhere at one time. Did everything—London, Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Petersburg. The exuberance of youth, you know. Things I'd better not have done. I see that now. It was the Thing. Young men are sheep, and the Thing is their shepherd. I see that now, too. The Thing is a finer Thing nowadays. I never really caught on to the Thing of my time. Caught on, you know, modern locution. Never really caught on to it, though I did it. Some of the fellows caught on to it—my contemporaries—and now one sees the consequence. In their children. Inherited. . . . My own boys. Nice fellows. Nice taste. Much better than ours ever was. There's an awakening, a new fastidiousness. Water wouldn't wash the young men of my day clean of their habits, some of them. Then it was thought manly to wallow. Now, manliness is cleanliness. Synonymous. Yes. Nice fellows, both those boys. Great friends, too. I shall be glad to have them home again."

He had slipped his watchguard from his buttonhole, and had fastened it round his wrist like a bracelet with the watch dangling. As he talked he held it up and tapped it from time to time to keep it swaying, his eyes on it the while, with the intentness of a scientist testing a theory in dynamics. Ella also seemed intent upon the experiment, but she was too accustomed to his various digital exercises to pay much attention to them, and her thoughts were elsewhere.

"Are they not at home, then?" she ventured, her heart thumping. She knew they were not. The newspapers kept her broadly informed of their whereabouts, but she was thirsting for intimate details.

"No. Gone abroad. Eustace, the younger, persuaded Ninian —Melton, you know—to travel. Put a girdle round the earth. Eustace thought Ninian was moping. Urged change of scene. Exploded fallacy. The only real change is an emotional change. Travelling, you may get it; also you may not. Eustace has all

the initiative. The younger often has. Effect of the mother's state of mind. An argument against primogeniture. There's Adnam Pratt. Much finer fellow than his brother Seraph."

"They are half-brothers," Ella reminded him argumentatively, "and both first-born of their mothers."

"True," said the Duke. "I'd forgotten. But the mothers! There's the crux! Find the right woman, eh? Adnam's mother, now! There's a woman! And his father. Consequence Adnam, gentleman to the core. Adnam can thank God for his parents."

"So can Lord Melton."

"Thank you, my dear." The Duke smiled, and nodded, then looked grave and sighed. "Heredity. Greatly interested in the subject. We pride ourselves on a long line of descent and remain culpably careless of the breed. Good blood, uncontaminated blood—what does that mean in men's mouths? A mass of diseases very often, at the end of a long line of noble ancestors."

He slipped watch and chain up his sleeve, and harked back to his children. "Ann might be stronger, in every way," he repeated. "The boys were always healthy. Fine little chaps. When the Queen first saw them she exclaimed——" He broke off in his queer, abrupt way, and Ella, anxious to keep him to the subject, again ventured.

"And will they soon come back again?" she asked.

"My dear," he exclaimed. "Your voice! The way you said that. Reminds me of an old song. Only the song says, 'Will he no come back again?' Plaintive, appealing. Do you sing, Ella?"

"No, your Grace."

"Should have thought you did. Ah, well! 'Her voice was ever soft, gentle and low, an excellent thing in a woman.' Well said, that. Fine thing to go down to posterity seated on a saying, so to speak. An epigram and all that sort of thing, you know."

"What is an epigram?" she asked.

"An epigram, my dear? Oh, just a neat, portable turn of expression which, like a good way of warming up cold meat, makes a platitude appetising and profitable. Your Shakespeare makes the cold meat go further than anybody."

"Shakespeare has a lineal descendant in the art of saying things neatly and profitably, it seems," Ella smilingly observed.

The Duke looked pleased, but he relapsed into silence. He

had got hold of a large pincushion, and seemed entirely absorbed in the act of transferring the pins from it to the arm of his chair.

Ella was longing to ask a question, aching to bring him back to "the boys." When would they return? But she saw no way to revive the subject. It may be, however, that the intensity of her desire for news impinged on the mind of the Duke, for presently, as if he were thinking aloud rather than speaking to her, he said: "Eustace had to return to his Regiment. Duty. A pity too. Ninian misses him. Good friends, those boys. But Ninian is sticking to his itinerary. Teach him a lot. India, China, Japan, America."

"It will take long?" Ella spoke breathlessly.

"About two years from the time they started," the Duke answered indifferently. "Not long to him. 'The joy of eventful living,' you know. Hope he'll settle for good and all when he comes home. See the world early, then marry; that's the thing to do. And choose. None of your noble dames with hereditary disease in their families. Degenerate specimens. I'll talk to him about that. A fine, intelligent country girl, of good sound stock, that's the thing for a wife. Plenty to choose from. Educated, refined, straight. A precious sight straighter than others I know. Contaminated blood contaminates the character, and comes out in bad conduct. Vice."

He threw the pincushion aside, and began to walk up and down the room.

Ella sat silent and pale, her heart palpitating with hope. Surely he knew and approved?

The Duke noticed her pallor. "Appetite good?" he asked. "Mustn't lose your appetite!"

She pulled herself together. "If I lost my appetite my stepmother would lose her big little market," she answered lightly.

"Her big little market, eh? Eggs, cheese, butter, poultry, cream——"

"Fruit and flowers," she prompted, laughing.

"Don't eat 'em all yourself, though? Household helps, I suppose? Good big household. Can't be dull." He stopped and looked at her shrewdly, brought back to the object of his visit. He generally professed a special object for each particular visit.

"I dropped in just for a moment," he explained, "to see if you wanted anything. Do you? Got everything you want?"

"No," she answered unexpectedly.

"Eh? No!" the Duke exclaimed. "What do you want, eh?"

"I want exercise," she replied.

"Ah!" He considered her seriously, then repeated: "Exercise, eh? You go out every day, I hope—drive, walk, and all that sort of thing, eh?"

"Yes. I drive somewhere—anywhere, so long as the way is open and lonely, and the air fresh. And I get out and walk. But walking is not enough"—she stretched up her arms—"I want exercise all over."

He took a turn up and down the room, pondering deeply.

"You are not lonely?" he asked by the way. She shook her head. "And you want exercise. All over." He gave his best attention to this point.

"Of course," he said at last. "Very natural. Other girls go to balls. Ride, dance, shoot, fence—gymnastics 'all over.' Spirit of the day. Comes out even in seclusion. Significant. We don't keep up with the times, the times keep us up—up-to-date. That's it, isn't it? The Times force on us their own forms of expression. No one ever said up 'to date' in *my* young days. Commercial language. Came in with commerce for younger sons."

He took another turn up and down the room.

"Exercise 'all over,'" he again repeated. "Of course. I ought—— That ought to have been thought of. I must speak to Bosc." He said this as though Bosc were to blame, and again relapsed into thought. "Yes," he burst out at last, addressing the whole apartment. "Must take care of that splendid physique. Health before everything. What the nation wants is health. The parents of healthy children are good patriots." He made a break, then resumed. "Exercise all over, eh? Yes. Riding, dancing, gymnastics, fencing, shooting—all fashionable for young ladies. You pay your money *et cetera*. Can't do everything. Certainly not. I must speak to Bosc. Adaptable Bosc, eh? Good man, though. You can trust him."

"I do."

After another pause, he suddenly exclaimed. "Rowing! A boat on the river. Punting, too! I'd forgotten rowing and punting. Capital exercise. Ever learnt to row?"

"Oh, yes. I can row. I often boated with Adnam."

"You like Adnam?" He asked this wistfully.

She smiled. Of course she liked Adnam. Words were superfluous.

He recurred once more to the suspicion that disturbed him. "So you are not lonely?" he said. "You are making friends, and all that sort of thing, eh?"

"I make acquaintances every day," she replied.

"Ah! There is a difference," he rejoined. "Acquaintances are not friends of necessity. But they may become so. Do they—er—try to follow up the acquaintance? Ask you to their houses, you know, and that sort of thing?"

"Some of them," she answered indifferently.

"Not always the right sort, I'll be bound. Lady Ballard and Sarb and that sort of thing, male and female, eh?"

"What is that sort of thing?" she asked.

"The sort of thing I beg you to have nothing to do with," he admonished her. "Pests, the whole lot of them."

"And Mrs. Filmer Dabbs and her 'lot'?"

"Oh, they are all right—from the point of view of safety. One old thing I've quite a *penchant* for, but she discountenances my polite advances. Lady Coombes. She'll none of us. Swears by her own class. As good as told me so, and, by Jove! I respect her for it. Had to take her in sometimes at City dinners. . . . Dabbs? Let me see—oh! that son of theirs—impossible! You don't accept their invitations?"

"No, none of them."

"Right!" he exclaimed. "Right from every point of view. Better not go into the kind of society that is open to you at present. Miscellaneous. Bad too, some of it. I warn you."

The kind of society that was open to her *"at present."* There was a better kind, the right kind, in reserve for her, then! The kind for which she was to be kept untarnished by lower associations. He did know then! He did approve! The inference was inevitable.

BOOK III

BASS.—*The dearest friend to me, the kindest man,*
The best conditioned and unwearied spirit
In doing courtesies. . . .

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

CHAPTER I

ELLA, DEPRESSED, RECOVERS HERSELF

1

THERE was no standing still for Ella. The close of the season saw her as far advanced as she could have expected, but it was only the fall of the curtain on a promising first act. Everything depended on what was to follow. The scenario for her next act had yet to be blocked out; how should she proceed? She strolled into the showroom one hot Saturday afternoon, asking herself the question, and found herself accused of dilatoriness by the deserted aspect of the place. The windows were open and sun-shades softened the glare, but also kept out what airs were stirring, and the aerial dance of some few flies in a solitary shaft of sunlight which had made its way in through a crevice, was the only sign of life that disturbed the stagnant gloom. The exhibits, rainbow-hued and flower-like under their filmy veils of lace, seemed wilted, as decorations seem after an event, when they have served their purpose and are ripe for removal. Miss Hildenborough, seated on the edge of the platform, her hands idly folded on her lap, her head resting against a leg of the desk, was half asleep; but the constant Argus-Eyed, high-perched on her accustomed seat, and steadfast of expression as the figurehead of a gallant ship ending its days in a timber-yard, still watched over the empty showroom with vigilant attention, an unrelieved sentry, faithful to duty till the last. Ella's entry startled Miss Hildenborough to attention, caused the Argus-Eyed to look round inquiringly. In a flash Ella saw her way, and, quick to act, announced a sudden decision as glibly as if she had come prepared: "The Exhibition is over and closed," she said. "I shall see to the Duchess's lace myself. The other things you might pack up for me, Miss Hildenborough. Holidays now! You will both be free for two months." The satisfaction that showed in their faces was not unmixed. Two months without work might mean two months without

pay—Ella caught their thought, and added: "On full salaries, of course. And my grateful thanks to you both for all that you have done for me, and for the way that you have helped me—so willing always, so very kindly." Ending with a smile, she slipped away from them shyly, to avoid demonstrations of feeling.

"She's a bit of all right, is our Miss Banks," Miss Hildenborough declared, when Ella was out of hearing.

"She's for doing what's right at all events," the Argus-Eyed rejoined, "when she knows what is; but it's only the Lord Himself knows that every time."

Her eyes were on Ella, who was skimming across the room; a deep sigh heaved her ample bosom. Miss Hildenborough's eyes were also on Ella, but her feelings escaped in words. "A swan upon the water!" she mused sentimentally.

The Argus-Eyed left her desk—for the first time at an irregular hour since she seated herself there on the opening day. This thought occurred to her. "Well, I've done my duty at all events," she reflected aloud comfortably. She glanced round the empty room. "It's a sudden wind-up," she said. "I feel it. To think how we opened! All that crowd and her Royal Highness and everyone going mad about Miss Banks. What was that you said just now?—'A swan upon the water'? I've heard amany such silly things said, sitting here. There's gentlemen comes again and again just to see her walk across that floor. And not a soul in sight this minute but our three selves."

"You said we were in for a good thing, that day?" The questioning tone implied a doubt.

The Argus-Eyed bridled. "I said or you said," she rejoined, pouncing. "It don't matter who said it. True it was and true it is, and what I say now is, Here endeth the first lesson, to be continued in our next. Miss Hildenborough, it isn't my business, but I'm good at packing things, and if you're agreeable I'm ready to help. I'm nothing if not willing to oblige. But what I now say is, first a cup of tea."

Ella, left alone in the showroom, stood looking down at the Duchess's lace. Spread out on shining satin, the delicate texture and beautiful intricate design showed to perfection. If the goddess of love had draped herself with it, even the eye of a lover might well have lingered on the fairy web, indifferent to the form it adorned without concealing. Ella's thoughts went fur-

ther back than the opening day. If that lace could have spoken what splendid constancy it would have revealed! What strength to endure! The bitter cold of winter, the blazing heat of summer, the faintness from insufficient food! Into every leaf and spray she had woven something of herself, moments of gladness, of despair, of hope; expectations, thoughts of love and death; scraps of knowledge; recollections of things heard, read, and said; and reflections,—all the busy working of a strong and ardent mind concentrated on one mighty effort, one chance. She recalled the night Adnam came hot-foot to talk of his orchard, and her racked nerves could hardly bear his enthusiasm even when it overflowed with admiration of her all but accomplished task. She felt again the pause when Melton passed below on his horse, and looked up to her lattice[1]—and the revival of her flagging strength upon that, the daily answer to the daily question, "Will he come?" The daily resolution of the daily doubt, "Can it be just for a glimpse of me that he passes day after day?" Right well she knew by this time that men would do much less pleasant things than ride a blood-horse in her direction in the hope of seeing her, but she did not think of that now. Her memory leaped to the moment at the Castle when Melton spoke to her first—the day she offered her lace to the Duchess. What was it Melton said about the lace? "This is the kind of thing you should wear yourself," and what did she answer? "When the time comes, I shall." He had been taken aback by that! And she had done well to take him aback.

Reminiscence halted there. She began to fold up the lace. "When shall I see you again?" she thought. "And where?" She smiled to herself. Measuring the way she had made since that morning, considering all that had been done for her and whence her help had come, no wonder the answer shaped itself to her satisfaction. "When I do see you again, wherever it be," she thought, with her eyes on the goal always hovering in view though at indefinite distances, sometimes near, sometimes afar off—"When I see you again, wherever it be, I shall have arrived!"

2

She took her precious parcel to her sitting-room. The door was ajar and opened softly at a touch. Standing with his back

[1] See *Adnam's Orchard*.

to her was a small boy in buttons, gloating over one of her books, which he held open in his hand.

"Who may you be?" Ella asked.

The small boy turned round, startled, but not disconcerted.

"Who may you be?" Ella repeated, smiling.

He had a wide mouth, good strong teeth, a broad, flattish nose, a well-shaped head, thick, wiry, reddish-brown hair, and wide-open, merry, pale blue eyes—altogether a humoursome face, and the humour won him a smile.

"Please, my lidy, I'm Timothy," he answered, holding the book with a finger between the leaves to keep his place; "but they calls me Pecky—Pecky Tim, 'cos I'm allus peckish."

"And what are you doing here?"

"Please, my lidy, I'm 'ouse boy. Me aunt, wot's your Mrs. Pounce"—Pecky Tim spoke deliberately—"got over Mr. Bosc, an' 'e engiged me—my lidy."

Having spoken, Pecky Tim, with both hands clasping the book to his breast and intelligent alertness in his eyes, stood quite at his ease, rubbing his left leg with his right foot, and watching Ella as a young dog watches the hand with the biscuit in it, ready to bound, but not to be betrayed again to futile exertion by any more feints of throwing.

"You mustn't call me 'my lady,'" said Ella. "I am not a ladyship."

"I 'now," Pecky Tim rejoined with a nod, changing his position so as to attend to his right leg with his left foot, but always keeping tight hold of the book, with his finger between the leaves. "But, please, my lidy, my aunt said I must. She said it ud get the right side o' you, becos you wasn't no lidy at all."

"Indeed!" They stood considering each other, Ella with suppressed amusement, Pecky Tim on the alert for developments.

"What is your business as houseboy?" Ella asked at last. "What do you do?"

"Do 's I'm told, 'ang about, keep m' eyes open."

These were evidently standing orders learnt by heart.

"And report to your aunt, I suppose," Ella suggested.

"'Report'?" Pecky queried vaguely.

"Tell your aunt," Ella revised. "Let her know all that you see and hear."

"That's the ticket," said Pecky Tim, enlightened and com-

placent. "My lidy," he added with a jerk. At the same time, suddenly remembering another item of his aunt's coaching, he brought his busy foot to the ground, clicked his heels together, and caricatured a bow.

Ella lost countenance. "Pecky Tim, you are a joy!" she said.

Pecky Tim's eyes searched about the carpet for the meaning of this, but finding no explanation, he set it down as encouragement because she laughed, and let it pass.

"I seen you afore, lidy," he remarked, with the smiling confidence of one mentioning a circumstance which he knows it will be pleasant to recall.

"Where?" Ella asked, puzzled.

Pecky Tim, keeping fast hold of the book, deliberately turned a Catherine wheel, righted himself alongside of her, grinned up in her face, and pointed a waggling finger at an invisible something in front of them.

Ella instantly remembered him. It was the boy who had shared with her his delight in the discovery of Mr. Harkles's dangling staylace.

"That mide yer laugh, lidy!" he exclaimed, scoring a success to himself.

Ella sat down with her precious parcel on her lap. She was a little uncertain how to proceed with dignity. She had no particular reason for keeping him now, except that his talk amused her. The drift of his confidences had not struck her as important. But it occurred to her to ask what he was doing in her sitting-room.

"Jest lookin' round, lidy," he answered, and then, without intending it, he expanded the statement by looking at the book in his hand.

"Who gave you leave to look at that book?" Ella asked, affecting severity.

"I on'y jest took it up, lidy," Pecky offered for excuse, then, without a pause, tried distraction. "It says——" he found the place, and read, sing-song:

"The bi' stood on the burnin' deck
W'ence all but 'im 'ad fled—

"Why didn't 'e scoot, lidy?"

"Oh—because he was a brave, good, obedient boy, and his father had told him to stay there."

"'E must 'a bin a soft to stiy there w'en the deck was afire," was Pecky's decided opinion. "If 'e 'adn't bin a soft 'e'd 'ave 'nown 'is father wouldn't 'a wanted 'im to stiy there, not if the deck was burnin'. I lay it wasn't afire w'en 'e told 'im to stiy, leastwiys if 'e warn't drunk. P'raps," he suggested interrogatively, "it was cussedness? 'E'd 'now 'is father 'ud be riled if 'e stiyed."

"Oh, no," Ella improved the occasion. "Of course, the ship was not on fire when his father told him to stay, and of course he did not stay to annoy his father. He stayed because he was a hero. He would not desert his post."

Pecky attended to his right leg again with his left foot, his eyes looking out into space, intent upon the incident. He had never heard that discretion was the better part of valour, but his shrewdness revolted against what struck him as a want of commonsense.

"He called to his father," Ella explained, "but his father was down below, dying of the wounds he had received in the battle. He could not hear his boy."

"Oh, then 'e did 'oller," said Pecky. "I guess," he concluded, summing up the position with the help of such material as his own experience provided from observation of the usual attitude of fathers and sons towards each other in his walk of life—"I guess 'e'd 'ave scooted only 'e was afraid 'is father 'ud wop 'im."

Considering the tender mercies of fathers and the usual way of maintaining discipline in the Royal Navy in Casabianca's days, the terror of a "wopping" might well have constrained a boy in the face of fire until it was too late. This did not occur to Ella, however. She refused to consider the sharp, cynical, Cockney boy's suggestion as new light thrown on the subject; but it revealed the boy himself to her as of interest, a personality possessed of a mind that was worth developing. She took the work in hand without a moment's loss of time.

"If you will learn that poem by heart, and come here and repeat it to me as soon as you know it, I will give you the book," she promised.

"Will ye, lidy, will ye true? Ye're not kiddin' me?" he asked, pathetically eager to believe her.

"Timothy," Ella answered impressively. "I always truly mean every word I say."

"My!" Timothy exclaimed, admiring the assertion as a mag-

nificent exaggeration. But also he took it as a superlative kind of assurance of present good faith, and, in his haste to win the prize, he bolted with the book incontinently.

This was the beginning of an intimacy which was a recurrent source of interest and diversion to Ella.

She shrugged her shoulders at Pecky's ingenuous exposition of his aunt's attitude towards her; she had divined it all along, and it did not trouble her. Nor did she think anything of the addition of the boy to her household. That was Mr. Bosc's business. He came once a week to see to the accounts and arrange things generally. Ella had nothing to do either with receipts or expenditure. Mrs. Pounce submitted the housekeeping books to him for settlement, and the Argus-Eyed handed over all moneys received in the showroom. Ella drew on him for her private outlay, and had been prepared to account to him for every penny, but he told her this was unnecessary, the money being hers to do exactly what she liked with. She had asked how much per annum she was entitled to, and he had answered vaguely, "No fixed sum, but enough in reason." He also gave her advice which was an echo of the Duke's. She must spend on herself liberally. Distraction was necessary to keep up her strength—mustn't let herself run down. Dress, too. Being well-dressed keeps a woman's heart up; besides, her appearance was part of her stock-in-trade.

Ella had no conception of the amount required to keep up such an establishment as hers. She took it for granted that the receipts balanced the outlay; were it otherwise she thought she knew what the consequences would be. The Duchess was not one to finance a losing concern, and the Duchess was her patroness. Ella had enough to attend to without wasting herself on a part of the business which was not her affair. She did her own share and was satisfied to leave all else to Mr. Bosc. The means were provided, but on her rested all the onus of devising the ways. Her Exhibition was only a beginning. It had answered well for the purpose, but something new must be devised for an attraction, for she must continue to attract. There was only one way to fit herself for the position she intended to secure, she must become intimate with the mind of Society and adopt its ways. For this purpose she could not frequent Society, therefore Society must be drawn to her, but how? How? Sitting with her precious parcel in her lap, she asked herself the question again and again. Something sensational and

unexpected, that was the thing. Society could be moved in a body, emotionally. It loved excitement, it had feelings to be touched; but what was there in lace either to excite or to touch? Ella could think of nothing; she felt beaten; her heart sank. In this state of depression her mind wandered from one trouble to another. Past difficulties became mixed with her present perplexity, the difficulties which had not been satisfactorily overcome. It was one of those moments of which our failures take advantage to present themselves, threateningly. Ella thought of the lace-makers for whom she had hoped to do so much, and how little so far she had been able to do! She had made lace fashionable for a season, but it was the middlemen who had profited chiefly; besides, fashions are fleeting, and the question she had now to face was how to keep lace to the fore, oust the oppressive middlemen, and permanently benefit the workers? The task for the moment seemed hopeless, and she had sunk to the last depth of depression. She could sink no lower; but neither could she remain there. The mind is dynamically policed, it must move on.

Urged by an impulse to act, to do something, she started up, her eyes roving about the spacious room. The comfort, the elegance, the luxury of her own surroundings, in view of the misery in which she knew her fellow-workers toiled, reproached her. But here the reaction set in. The pictures on the walls—there were several now, all presents from the Duke—suggested the consoling thought that she was not responsible for the conditions of her life at present. Benefits had been heaped upon her in such a way that she had no choice but to accept them, or to abandon her project; for what good could she have done if she had condemned herself to the poverty she was bent on relieving? No voice crying in the wilderness had ever been listened to yet! The power that protected her had known what was best to further her purpose.

Eased awhile by this assurance, her thoughts strayed from abstract power to the Duke in person, whose friendship she counted her prime success. She had had others though, minor successes. They came to mind now, marshalling themselves in detail for her encouragement.

But the tormenting thought recurred, it obsessed her. Those poor girls, how sorely they needed a champion! It was not for the lace-makers alone that she was contending, but for every underpaid, oppressed, browbeaten woman worker. She

must, she would help them. But how? How? The inward monitor, silent until now, instantly responded. In a flash she saw a way. Only the first step was clear to her, but she determined to set out. The first step taken, she was confident that the next, whatever it might be, would be made equally clear to her.

CHAPTER II

HAPPEN WHAT MAY, ELLA MUST HAVE HER WAY

1

ELLA knew the value hygienically of a day of rest, and was never for frittering a precious Sunday away in any pursuit that was not entirely restorative.

But a thorough change of mind was not always possible. There were occasional bulls that could best be taken by the horns on Sunday, and this next day after closing her Exhibition was one of these occasions. She was to spend it with the Boscs, and, the opportunity being excellent for her purpose, she set out with the intention of settling an important matter of business while she was there.

Pecky Tim stood on the steps beside Beveridge, to see her off, a seedling beside a gnarled old forest tree.

"A lovely day for the country, my lady," was Beveridge's salute.

"A lovely day," she answered, glancing up at the radiant strip of blue above the houses.

Full summer was upon the land, inviting to cool green shades, where, to the murmur of running water and the whisperings of leaves, spirit is eased of its burden of flesh and spreads its wings. "What a day to be imprisoned in these stuffy streets!" thought Ella, with a passing qualm of pity for the crowds, which, as a rule, she was only conscious of as part of the pageant of her life. She paused at the door of her carriage and looked at Pecky Tim. Pecky Tim was looking at her, and a wistful something in his eye made her sorry for him in particular. "Timothy," she said, "come with me. You shall spend the day in the Garden of Eden among the flowers."

Timothy ran down the steps, his buttons flashing in the sunshine. "Do you mean it, lidy?" he gasped.

Ella was seating herself. "Get in," she said. Pecky, bareheaded, was about to obey. "There is time to get your cap," she added.

As they drove off she warned him: "You must not speak a word. If you do I shall put you down, and you will have to walk home alone."

Pecky, on the back seat, expressed determined obedience symbolically, by clapping his hand over his mouth.

Ella thought no more of the people who might be feeling the want of fresh air. In the person of Pecky Tim she had done what she could for them. Having called her carriage-groom to order for sitting-down with his coat-tails awry, she gave herself up to perfect ease of body and mind. The pleasant motion of her well-appointed carriage, the rhythmical beat of the horses' hoofs, the closed shops proclaiming toil suspended, the briskness of the liberated people stepping out in their holiday best, enjoying the sense of freedom, that rarest pleasure of their lives; the clanging confusion of the church-bells—the whole Sabbath atmosphere which releases the tension of the week, and is at once so gratefully reposeful to jarred nerves and so reviving—capturing her every sense, wooed her busy brain to rest. Such precious moments of remorseless idleness are more restorative than sleep. In sleep the mind may work hard, as we know by the tired awakening. The surest refreshment for the brain is when healthy, pleasurable sensation dominates thought. Thus quiescent, Ella added such stores to her strength in reserve, that it seemed as if her marvellous vitality could never expend itself, as if she could never have enough of active living.

Mr. Bosc was loitering in the garden, listening for the carriage. He had gone to the early service in order to be free to receive Ella while his mother was at High Mass. Long, lean, and dry he was, and yet not unattractive in the speckless neatness of his well-made Sunday morning suit. Ella never asked herself if Mr. Bosc were good-looking or not. He was just Mr. Bosc to her, with nice thick grey hair that suited him. A sterling good friend to whom she was cordially attached. She had not yet begun to suspect that at the sound of her carriage coming up the road his heart beat quicker, or that he had it in him to be an ardent lover as well as a good son; and she would not have been pleased if she had suspected it. His friendship was invaluable; his love would have been an encumbrance. Un-

sentimental herself, she had overlooked the sentimental side of Mr. Bosc.

"I've brought Timothy," she said. "I've promised him a day in the Garden of Eden. You don't mind, I hope? I hadn't the heart to leave him behind in that hot, stuffy street this lovely day."

"Timothy is welcome," said Mr. Bosc, blinking at Timothy, nose and eyebrows twitching. "It is a drawback to your pleasure, I am afraid, that you could not empty the whole town into the fresh air this lovely day."

"If only one could!" Ella answered. "There, Timothy," she broke off hastily, "run away. But don't touch the flowers, or get into mischief."

"Please, lidy," said Timothy, his eyes on as much of her as eyes could take in at one time, for she was a wonder and mystery to him. "Please, lidy, I would like to go to the stibles."

"Well, go to the 'stibles,'" Ella answered, laughing. "It's a matter of taste."

"Happily, *il y en a pour tous les goûts,*" Mr. Bosc observed. "What would you like to do?"

"Sit out," she replied, and they strolled into the garden side by side. "Timothy is a joy for which I must thank you," she said, when that young gentleman was out of earshot. "I only made his acquaintance yesterday."

She described the interview, and Mr. Bosc, casting sidelong glances at her, listened well content. To see her glad in anything, but more especially in some pleasure of his procuring was too deep a delight for words.

To the Joy of Midday and the Flowers was the arbour for the moment. Borders and beds, bathed in sunlight, were a blaze of colour. The air bore whiffs of perfume which Ella, reclining at ease in a garden-chair, inhaled with pleasure; while Mr. Bosc, his eyes on the flowers, his whole being alive to her loveliness, crossed his long legs and adjusted the tips of the fingers of one hand to the other, and felt that here were heaven enough for him, if only it could last!

But this was Ella's opportunity. Her business must be settled while they were alone. Before her project was broached, there could be none of the remorseless idleness for her head upon which her heart was set. She had decided on her next step, and, as was her wont, having made up her mind, she

had come, not to consult her adviser, but to win him to her views.

"I have closed the Exhibition," she began, speaking between pauses, dispassionately, so as not to disturb the heavenly peace more than was necessary. "My clients are all away. I believe people come back to town in the winter."

Mr. Bosc, ruthlessly snatched from his dream of bliss, turned to look at her. "Yes," he said, "there is a kind of winter season determined by the reopening of Parliament."

He waited; then, as Ella did not speak, he asked the question she was expecting: "What do you propose to do in the interval?"

"I wish to consult you about that," she answered. "I propose to do a great deal. I have promised myself a great pleasure—if you approve."

Mr. Bosc rose to the bait. "Anything I can do to give you pleasure," he was beginning—

But she interrupted. It would not have been fair to let him commit himself to a promise in the dark. "You are too kind," she said, "but I do not mean to give you any trouble I can help. I shall want a cheque."

Habit asserting itself, he fell back on the accustomed formula: "Anything in reason in the way of money——"

"Oh, this is reasonable and right and necessary," she smilingly interposed. "It must appeal to my patroness if she is really in earnest in her desire to help the helpless. I hope her interest has not lapsed."

Mr. Bosc was silent, his mind working. In the little interval light airs played with the flowers and their perfume was wafted abroad. Ella's sense snatched the moment for enjoyment.

"It is not for yourself, then?" Mr. Bosc said at last.

"It is a part of my object in life," she replied. "Isn't the scent of the roses delicious!—I want to visit all the lace-making centres in Europe that I can reach in two months. It will take two months."

"For any special purpose?" he asked.

"For a special purpose, yes. To do any good I must have the whole business at my finger-ends." She stopped, then added without emphasis, as if it were an afterthought, "and in my own hands."

Mr. Bosc took out his pocket-book and made a note. "I must consult my client," he said, neutral as a fish.

Neutrality is more exasperating than opposition. Opposition is a wall to be scaled; neutrality, a bog to sink in, from whichever side it is approached.

"Your client!" Ella rejoined, her dissatisfaction escaping in a sigh.

Mr. Bosc looked at her inquiringly. His ears were open to the slightest inflection of her voice, and he had displeased her, but how?

"You think the Duchess will not consent?" Ella suggested, tackling the bog.

"The—er—Duchess?" he repeated, looking at her vaguely.

"The Duchess, my generous patroness," Ella answered, with a slight shrug of her shoulders.

Mr. Bosc changed his position and twitched his nose, symptoms of disturbance.

"Why does the Duchess hate me?" Ella dreamily pursued, her eyes on a sparrow that was bathing in the dust.

"Hate you!" Mr. Bosc was startled. "Your—your 'generous patroness,' as you just now called her!"

"A patroness who never comes near me," Ella answered.

The discussion was taking a turn she had neither desired nor anticipated, but the mind has a way of easing itself unexpectedly of irritating matter with which it has been long secretly encumbered, and she succumbed to the impulse.

"She opened the Exhibition," Mr. Bosc reminded her.

"She attended Princess Anna on that occasion," Ella corrected.

"But you owe the Princess's interest to her."

"Do I?" Ella looked at him. "Do I?" she insisted.

With a twitch of his whole face, Mr. Bosc passed the question by.

Ella took up the theme on a new note. "What else has the Duchess done for me?" She seemed to be asking herself the question.

"My—er—client——" Mr. Bosc began, detaching himself from her train of thought.

Ella sat up. "Do you know, Mr. Bosc," she interrupted energetically, "you have never once mentioned your 'er—client' to me by name?"

"Indeed," said Mr. Bosc, as if this were a fact which had hitherto escaped him. "When the Duchess consented to be-

come your patroness," he went on, "the bargain was that she should not be troubled with details."

"I seem to be an impersonal item in the Duchess's accounts," Ella said. "How am I entered? 'Lace Girl nuisance, so much'?"

"My client's interest never flags," Mr. Bosc replied pacifically. "I have to make my report regularly, or risk being called over the coals."

"I do not understand the Duchess," Ella complained.

"Duchesses, Miss Ella," he was beginning, "are not to be understood by——"

"The common herd," she caught him up.

"The common herd," he repeated tranquilly; "nor even by you, Miss Ella, who—if I may be allowed—are certainly not one of the common herd."

"What else am I, a pauper living on alms!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I am weary of these alms! When shall I be able to repay?"

"Are you not repaying every day?" he asked. "The success of your enterprise is a success for the Duchess. I feel sure that even duchesses—if I may misquote—find that our 'Successes are our best having.'"

Ella considered this a moment, then harked back. "Somebody troubles much about details. Somebody takes a human interest in me," she said significantly.

Mr. Bosc smiled complacently. He had mistaken the significance.

Ella and Mr. Bosc had not mentioned the Duke to each other since that one occasion which left Mr. Bosc upset, and Ella shrank from mentioning him now, though she could not have explained why. She knew well enough that the Duke took a human interest in her, but did Mr. Bosc know? She was fain to discover. "The Duke was disposed to be friendly to my project, I believe," she remarked tentatively.

Mr. Bosc's nose twitched, his gratification died a sudden death.

"You may be sure that the Duke is friendly to your project," he assured her. "Even dukes and duchesses have interests in common, you know. The one may supplement the—er—kindnesses of the other."

"I sometimes fancy that the supplement in my case is in excess of the original benefaction," Ella ventured. "The

means I am allowed, apart from the necessities of my enterprise, for self-indulgence——"

"Self-improvement, shall we say, Miss Ella?" Mr. Bosc suggested. "We know what you do in that way. The Duke thinks more of that sort of thing than the Duchess. Culture is a hobby of his. *La carrière ouverte aux talents. . . . Ouvrir une carrière a quelqu'un,* that is one of the pleasures of his life. Also, he considers it one of the duties of his position to smooth the way for talent when talent has been discovered."

"I am an experiment, then."

She spoke evenly, but Mr. Bosc suspected bitterness. "Do you object?" he asked persuasively.

It was only the Duchess's bounty Ella thought of as alms. The significance she attached to such benefactions as she could trace to the Duke directly, placed them in a category of rights. The motive she attributed to the Duke gave her a right to his help, made it her duty to accept it. From what Mr. Bosc had said, she gathered confirmation of her suspicion. "'Codlin *is* the friend, not Short,'" she thought.

"No, I do not object," she answered, smiling.

Mr. Bosc met smile with smile. "Surely those who give us the means to develop the best that is in us," he proceeded, expanding the statement for her comfort and encouragement; "those who help us to fit ourselves for any chance, are benefactors in the right direction, benefactors not only of the individual, but also of the race at large—public benefactors. All that we owe such benefactors is to do our best to further their high intent."

Ella, with an inclination of her head, apparently accepted the whole contention, but she had only heard one phrase: "Those who help us to fit ourselves for any chance." Doubtless Mr. Bosc had no suspicion of the Duke's full intention, but how could she be mistaken? Philanthropy did not account for his pleasure in her company. Then the position in which she had been placed—a position allowed at that time not to be derogatory to the social standing even of well-born ladies, *vide* the number of them who went into business; a position, moreover, which was public enough to secure a just estimate of her character by her conduct and establish her in the world's esteem, should she not be found wanting,—a veritable trial by fire, to enable her to prove herself fit for any position! Oh, no! There could be no mistake! Her heart expanded. "You are

right," she said, with a sigh of content, speaking softly always and between pauses, as Mr. Bosc best loved to hear her speak. "You reassure me. I am in good hands."

The smile that came after her words, and the look she gave Mr. Bosc made him feel that he himself was the not undeserving object of her confidence. Of a truth, in so far as she was in his hands she was in good hands, and had reason to be grateful to him. He would not have said a word to indicate that this was so, but it was pleasant to believe that she realised the fact. His whole face twitched and beamed, but she gave him short shrift to enjoy his gratification. She was tenacious, and all this wandering from the point was merely an interlude. "About my holiday task," she recommenced. "You approve of it, and are going to help me, I hope?"

But Mr. Bosc's complacency extended no further than his heart; his head remained level, and it was the cautious professional man who replied. "I understand," he said, flipping the leaves of his pocket-book, which he still held in his hand. "I understand that you would like to visit the lace handworkers, an extensive visitation, familial and regional—er, yes. In pursuit, I suppose, of your original effort to succour the industry and restore it to its pristine importance." He opened his pocket-book, read what he had written, carefully closed the book and put it in his breast-pocket, at the same time closing the subject. "I see," he said. "I must consult my client."

Neutral as a fish still, Ella had not moved him a jot. She gave in gracefully for the time being. "Thank you," she said, and relapsed into dreamful ease.

A heat haze, like quivering glass, made visible by the background of dark evergreens which enclosed the garden, hung over the flower beds. Glimpsed through openings in the shrubs, green alleys winding away to the woods invited to cool retreats. The midday mist was over all. Only the bees and the butterflies, humming and flitting, remained on the move; all other activities were suspended.

"How heavenly still it is," Ella said. "This is what I call life. Full consciousness of living. Delightful living, every sense satisfied, every breath a pleasure realised. They know how to live who have learnt so to sit, 'like gods together, careless of mankind.'"

The Frenchman latent in Mr. Bosc quickened to expression. He looked out upon the garden, and thought of "La Faute de

l'Abbé Mouret," not unsympathetically; then pulled himself up. In her company, how could he! His English blood argued for the Lotus Eaters, it were surely the fitter theme; but the undercurrent of his feelings rejected impassivity, and effected a compromise. Lovely shapes, perfume, colour, sunshine, fresh air, and Ella's voice were an intoxicating mixture, and one of which it was not unlawful to partake. Partaking involuntarily, his sentiments found vent in verse. Meaningly he recited:

"My soul is an enchanted boat,
Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float
Upon the silver wakes of thy sweet—"

But Ella was not interested in Mr. Bosc's soul. "I'm hungry," she interrupted prosaically. "What time do we lunch?"

2

Mr. Bosc's unsympathetic attitude left Ella in a state of suspense. She suspected opposition to her project, and she determined not to leave the matter in his hands. She'd move heaven and earth, but she'd have her way! For heaven and earth there stood the Duke, and she wrote to him. She wrote more explicitly than she had spoken to Mr. Bosc, and more emphatically. She gave him full details of her project, with a touch of feeling thrown in to soften the dryness. "Codlin is the real friend—not Short, I'll be bound," she thought, "and now we shall see!"

But she did not sit down and wait idly. She had sown her seed, and, like a good gardener, she left it to germinate, and turned her attention to other details of her occupation. The week that followed was one of the busiest of her life. The question, how to attract the crowd back to her showroom when it was reopened, was unanswered. All that she had arrived at was the certainty that some new device was necessary. As a beginning, she had the ballroom emptied, so that she could make an entirely fresh start. It was a clearing of the decks for action. Minor details must be seen to at once, and the scene set ready for the next act whatever it might be. The inspiration would come, of course, and in the meantime it was her duty to keep going. Duty done to-day is a friend to help

us; but duty put off till to-morrow is a judge to try and to punish. Ella was never for postponement. She had a fatigue party of workmen in to clean and to polish. Tarnished gilding was turned into old gold again. The ceiling that was mistaken for Grindling Gibbons by people shaky in their dates, was whitened up to Adam at his best. The murk of London was skimmed from dark Spanish mahogany doors till they shone like mirrors, and pillars reappeared as marble to the eye as well as to the mind. Vanloo and Boucher in medallion and panel came out of obscurity. The grace of the love-knotted garlands depending from flower-filled *corbeils* and linking pilaster to pilaster was renewed. Prismatic colours were brought out to play on the cut glass pendants of the splendid lustres hanging from the ceiling, and once more in the whole beautiful room the eighteenth century came into its own again.

Ella surveyed the work accomplished, and knew that it was good, but how about the next step?

The glow of the summer sunset was over all, sparkling on the hanging lustres, enriching the gilding, deepening the colours, startling painted presentments to life-likeness, mirroring the ceiling in the polished floor. And, oh, what a floor for a dance! No, not a mad wild whirl (she was no bacchante), but to glide over with sliding steps to measured music; slow steps, easy, dignified, meaningful, a stately play of stately grace. Had she lived in the days of those dances how at home she would have been! The pointed toe, the formal curtsey to the deep bow, the play of the fan, the finger tips daintily spreading the stiff brocade, and the smile that would have its way in spite of the restraint society required as seemly on the part of a lady of quality,—it all came back!

Her mind halted on the expression "came back," to examine it—a queer expression. How "came back"? Instantly an answer formulated itself in her mind: "Don't you know? Don't *you* know? Don't you *know?*" She set her head to listen, as if some one had spoken, and then, remembering that she was awake, laughed and rebuked herself for letting her dream-consciousness take shape and possess her. She must shake herself up and be rid of the inclination, or it would grow upon her.

She was standing in the deep doorway of her sitting-room, on the edge of the shining parquet. The ceiling, vaguely mirrored deep down in the polished expanse, caught her eye; she

looked at the fearful depth, into which it seemed as if an unwary step would plunge her. Yet the perfection of the floor invited her nimble feet, drew her irresistibly. Even with the thought in her mind that it looked dangerous, she slid forward just to try it, and stepped into a strange experience.

It was as if she had passed some barrier, not into a different place, but into a different state and measure of time. She was in a mist at first, and then there was music. The music seemed to be playing upon the mist to clear it, and gradually, as it thinned, she came out into a dazzle of candle light. And she was dancing. Her right hand was being held up by the tips of her fingers; with the tips of the fingers of her left hand she was daintily holding her skirt outspread. And she was like to laugh aloud, she was so joyous, but forebore, such conduct being unseemly. She was pointing her toes in a minuet, with sliding steps, each step a curtsey, and all about the room the dance was in progress, gallant gentlemen in velvet and brocade were bowing, with their hands on their hearts, to lovely ladies with powdered hair, who met the bows with slow deep curtseys, deliberately. It was all deliberate, done in full consciousness with artistic delight fully experienced in the practice of a lovely art. With such a partner this was dancing indeed. In set steps he turned her so that they faced each other, he to bow and she to curtsey. In the act she looked up, and instantly was caught into the mist again. And she had not seen his face! All she could recall was a familiar figure. Then mist and music thinned from sight and hearing, and she found herself back again in the nineteenth century, turning a pointed toe to complete the step on which she had ventured to try the floor. A moment had sufficed for the whole impression.

Giddy, terrified, chilled to the bone, she staggered into her sitting-room, and collapsed upon the sofa.

"What a horrible sensation," she thought. "What does it all mean?"

"Don't you know? Don't *you* know? Don't you *know?*" Again, independently of her, the words became articulate in her mind, the last one prolonged—"Don't you *know-o-o*"—as if in despair that she, who should know—"Don't *you* know"—should be so obtuse.

"Oh, I won't have this," cried Ella, starting up. "I've been doing too much. My brain is playing me false."

With a will which every act of her life had tended to

strengthen, she forced her mortal mind to combat this other power of perception and put it out of action. In this she succeeded for the time being, and she prided herself upon her success—her good common sense, as she thought it. Poor good common sense! How sadly mistaken it is possible to be in the use of it! Ella's good common sense was a candle burning in a shuttered room compared to the light by which she might have been working. But she had always relied on her common sense without a suspicion that she had an uncommon sense at her service on occasion, and she continued to rely upon it even after the day dawn from on high had gleamed in upon her for a moment through a crack in the shutters.

It was time for her drive, and she forced herself to go. Leaving the carriage, she loitered on foot in Richmond Park till the summer dusk descended, Pecky Tim in attendance, keeping always to heel. The fresh air braced her, her mind shed its vapours, and she arrived at a clear conclusion with regard to her queer experiences. The Corner House was haunted, but by ghosts of her own creation. The dead Brabants who had lived in it were so much to her, so often in her thoughts, it was inevitable that at times—when her nerves were strained by work and she was overwrought—she should fancy she heard them about, even imagine that she saw them. There was nothing to disturb her in that. After all, they were companionable spirits. It was eerie at night sometimes, she acknowledged to herself, when she was so far from everyone else in the great house as to be practically alone, and it seemed to her as if some invisible presence were making unavailing efforts to communicate with her. . . . Here she broke off to ask herself would anything happen if she lent herself to the effort? If she tried to help it? But this again was not common sense, and she checked the thought. She was imaginative, but upon that she had reason to congratulate herself. Imagination is the power which constructs. Everything accomplished has first to be projected by the imagination. All progress, whether of the individual or of the race, begins in some one greatly gifted, imaginative mind which foresees possibilities, forecasts discoveries. Penalties are exacted of such minds if they abuse their power by overtaxing their strength, and for her small gift she had to pay the penalty. She overworked her brain, and these queer experiences were danger signals. But oh, she was wise! She would be warned while yet the ghosts were friendly.

Suppose they should become frightful and destroy her with terror! She realised that this might happen, subjective as she knew them to be. But she would guard herself against them, she would refuse to entertain their friendly advances. Friendly! The dead Brabants her friends! Oh, but she liked to think them so. How her heart went out to them! How gladdening it was to imagine that they had taken her, the peasant girl, to their hearts, as if she had a claim upon them, and were fain to protect her. There was help in the fancy, and surely she might safely entertain it—a "pathetic fallacy." Poetry is mothered by "pathetic fallacies," and what would the world be without poetry?

The flying gold of the woodland floats through the air.

The Duke had a feeling for poetry, should she talk to him of all this? What would he say? Something unexpected probably, but of one thing she was sure; he would smile his smile indulgent, the Brabant smile.

She recalled it as she crossed the dusky hall and slowly mounted the stairs, smiling herself. The lights were unlit as yet, and all about her were deep shadows that seemed to move. She peered into them, still smiling. She felt in every familiar object a welcome home, and was thrilled by a sudden strange exhilaration.

"Dead or alive," she cried in her soul, "you have taken me to yourselves. I am one with the Brabants."

3

The next day Mr. Bosc appeared. She had ransacked the house for seats and cabinets to furnish the ballroom, and he found her superintending their arrangement. She plunged abruptly into explanations while they were still shaking hands.

"I must have everything congruous," she said. "A room that was designed to be open is disfigured if you put anything in the space but the people for whom it was left. Seats there must always have been round the room, up against the walls, the cabinets between are an innovation, but I must have them, and they don't look bad, you see." She stood with her head on one side considering the effect.

"The floor looks slippery," Mr. Bosc observed.

"There will be silk Persian rugs all round in front of the seats to make a pathway for the timid," she said. "My lace will be mostly hidden in the cabinets, but I am going to show some of the more beautiful pieces in those little glass-topped tables, *comme hors d'œuvre,* just to whet the appetite of possible purchasers."

"You are in spirits to-day," he observed.

"Haven't you come at last?" she laughed.

"How do you know I bring you good news?" he asked.

"You have never brought me anything else."

"Ah!" He twitched. "Reasoning by induction? Well, you are right. In so far as arrangements to carry out your project can be made independently of you, everything is arranged subject to your approval. But with one condition. I am to accompany you."

"Good," said Ella. "But won't it be a bother to you?"

"On the contrary," said Mr. Bosc. "I take a holiday every year at this time. I shall make this my holiday. Seeing new places is a pleasure I greatly enjoy and seldom have time for."

"But dragging about in my train," Ella remonstrated.

"I should hardly call it that," Mr. Bosc replied, but he remarked her imperious way of putting him in the place of an attendant, rather than a guide and guardian. "You will have a courier when we go abroad. I have secured an excellent linguist. You will also have a maid. I have engaged an experienced woman, accustomed to travelling, who will, if you like her, remain with you. If she does not suit you, another must be found. The—er—my client was under the impression that you had had a maid from the first. My orders were that your establishment was to be on the same scale as Lady Alicia Brabant's, with the exception of indoor menservants. It was thought better that you should only have women to deal with in the house. Beveridge, of course, was indispensable, but he is not exactly a house-servant. In your position a trusty man well known to us is necessary in case of emergencies. But it seems I overlooked a personal attendant, a lady's maid, in fact. I am exceedingly sorry."

"No need," said Ella. "How can you be expected to think of such things? In my case even a woman would not have thought a maid necessary. I never thought of having one myself. All the same she will save me a great deal of fagging

work, the sort of last-straw things that must be seen to, and are so wearing. Oh, Mr. Bosc, I *shall* be glad to have a maid!"

Mr. Bosc bent frowning over his papers. What a dolt he had been not to think of the maid himself, he who was so anxious that she should owe him some of her comfort in life and know it. But he said no more about that. A wise man does not make acquainted with his own imperfections one with whom he would stand well.

"The arrangement is," he branched off, "that we start as soon as it suits your convenience. I have here an itinerary I drew up which may be useful, subject to your approval. I think you will find all the important centres of the lace-making industry set down in the order it would be best for you to take them, so as to lose no time."

How wonderful it was to be the object of so much consideration! To have everything arranged and made easy for her like this! She knew whom she had to thank. Always responsive, he never failed her.

"Someone," she said slowly, "someone is very good to me."

4

Mr. Bosc gone, she was for inspecting her hunting ground, to judge of the finishing touches.

But before she could look about her, her attention was claimed by music in the street, music in the distance, approaching; a band playing a rollicking march. Her face became irradiated; listening, she clasped her hands as though to restrain herself, and smilingly waited, expecting pleasure. She was in the secret of that band, she knew who had the courage of his tastes, and marched to exhilarating music buoyantly, because he chose to. Someone was coming who might be sure of his welcome, the welcome that came from the best of her. But was he coming? Or would he pass?—she held her breath. The music rose *crescendo,* then stopped abruptly—at her door. She faced the entrance to the ballroom from the hall, the doors were flung wide, and there stood Gregor Strangworth, gravely smiling, on the edge of her slippery demesne. Skimming across to him, her hands extended, she exclaimed, "Oh, Mr. Strangworth, this is kind!"

"I know of your plans," he said, holding both her hands in his. "I have come to wish you God speed."

"Come to my sitting-room," she said, trying to draw him over the floor; but he looked uncertainly at the treacherous surface, shook his head, and held back. "What have you been doing here?" he asked, "Making a skating rink?"

"Oh, how can you!" she remonstrated, "my beautiful room, desecrated! The horrible roar of roller skates, the awkward poses, collisions, flops on the floor, loud exclamations, cries even! Do look round, Mr. Strangworth. Do look at the proportion, the balance of everything, the perfect equilibrium, the decorative loveliness! Could you bear to have it vulgarised by violence? Surely only cultivated voices, gentle manners, graceful, dignified movements, and rich dresses are admissible here—and music," she added.

"That is the way you feel it, is it?" he said, and reflected, his eyes alternately on her and on the room, as if he had discovered points in common. "You like the spaciousness?"

"I am at home here," she said. "It is as if I had been here before, as if I had come back after an absence."

She preceded him as she spoke, leading him by way of the hall to her sitting-room.

"I have heard you speak of reincarnation," she went on, as they seated themselves. "Perhaps I was here in the brave days of old, a retainer of the Brabants."

"Why not one of them?" he asked.

"It is so banal, that," she replied. "I have never heard anyone—pretending to remember—who didn't claim to have been something great—Cleopatra, or Alexander. Personally I should feel it humiliating to have retrograded from Queen of Egypt to Miss Once Was. I prefer to think of myself as still on the upward grade."

"Then you adopt the opposite pose to avoid banality," he said.

"I don't pretend to remember," she replied. "I don't believe in reincarnation. My faith is in what I know, my hope in what I can do."

She was conscious that Mr. Strangworth was watching her intently, but he only nodded, and altered the subject without abruptly changing it.

"I am wondering what I found you doing just now," he said. "For you are never idle, even when you appear to be. That mind of yours is always busy."

"I was sharpening my weapons for my next campaign," she

replied. "My first round with the world has whetted my appetite for conquest."

"Oh, Ella! Ella!" he exclaimed. "Weapons and conquest! Why do you think in terms of war? Surely it is better to make friends than to conquer enemies."

"We must conquer circumstances," she said.

"But why weapons? Why not tools? Don't think of the world as a field of battle. Think of it as a garden, a fruitful and pleasant garden, in which it is well to be working."

"My world is not a garden," she answered, with a touch of hardness. "It is a jungle, a rich and fertile jungle, if you like, but full of ravenous beasts and poisonous reptiles. I must be armed for the encounter."

He acknowleged to himself that the figure was true enough in her case, truer than his. She had not been born in a garden; hers had yet to be made.

"I must have weapons," she persisted. "I cannot move unarmed. But, of course, I must have tools as well, to cut my way through the jungle. Recommend me the best. People can be shaped to one's purpose," she added as an afterthought.

"Put yourself in God's hands, Ella," he solemnly implored her. "Sacrifice your pride of intellect, humble yourself to accept His gift of the Spirit, then you will find a path open before you through the jungle; the way of safety and of peace."

Ella, recoiling in spirit, bent her head to hide her distaste for such talk, and deceived him. He thought she was touched, and left it there. It is better not to emphasise a point once it is made. A word that has gone home to the heart, if left to itself, does its own work.

When he took his leave Ella let him out herself. The hall was empty, but as she returned to her room she caught a glimpse of Pecky Tim peeping at her through the door which shut off the passage leading to the basement. It was ajar.

"Timothy," she said severely. "You mustn't peep. Englishmen don't peep. They stand out boldly in the open."

Timothy, after carefully shutting the door behind him, stood out boldly in the open, his eyes on her, examining her, as was his wont, as if her appearance were new and strange to him.

"Why were you peeping?" she demanded.

He hung his head, but not in shame; he was trying to think what to say.

"I meant no 'arm," was the best he could do to begin with.

"I don't suppose you did," she said, and smiled. "But mind, never do such a thing again, promise me."

He sidled up to her confidentially. "Not if I'm not forced, lidy," he whispered; "but any way, I'll not split. Wi' the 'elp o' Gawd I'll lie like 'ell fust."

Her mind being full of other things, Timothy had only half her attention. "Nobody wants you to swear," she said perfunctorily. "And you mustn't use bad words. You don't want me to be ashamed of you, do you?"

"No, lidy. I promise." He was secretly fingering a bit of her dress to be closer in touch with her.

She had corrected him mechanically, being too used to his lapses into the peculiarities of his street vocabulary to think much of the matter.

"That's all right," she said. Then she gave him a playful pat, pushed him away, and turning, forgot the incident.

CHAPTER III

'IF AE SHEEP LOUP THE DIKE, A' THE LAVE FOLLOW"

1

THE commercial world of London at first, in so far as it had heard of Ella's enterprise at all, looked upon it with indifference, or with amusement, or with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders. Amateur trading had never yet damaged legitimate business, and social backing, however distinguished, was a capricious and fugitive influence which only brought the kind of custom to these ladylike concerns which you might expect for three days at a charity bazaar. Absurd was the harshest word that the shopkeeping world applied to it, more charitable in that than Society, for Society's word was "fishy." The patronage of a respectable duchess could not be denied, but why did the respectable duchess patronise a concern which must cost money, she being a duchess who was notoriously by way of saving? Society did not believe in unmixed motives, therefore Society clung to Mr. Harkles's first whispered pronouncement that the whole thing looked fishy. But the fishiness they suspected was not of a kind to keep the fashionable

away; on the contrary, it excited curiosity, than which there is nothing more powerful as a draw. How permanently to improve the status of the lacemakers was the question which had tormented Ella during that moment of deep depression; in the reaction she had seen how to extend the work she had already begun before she came to London. She had perceived the possibility of capturing and commanding the whole trade in the more beautiful and valuable laces, the kind most coveted by women of wealth. Her project was to organise the workers into a corporation of which she herself meant to be sole head and directress. She would be middleman on a new system, her object being, not to add to her own income, but to secure to the workers ample returns for their labour; and before any suspicion of the extent of her enterprise had got abroad she had succeeded beyond the point at which opposition might have thwarted her plan.

And she had succeeded with the help of Mr. Bosc. Without Mr. Bosc she never would have succeeded. Ella herself was well qualified to organise. Her prepossessing appearance alone would have been a great help to her arguments, and when to that was added her passionate sympathy with and intimate knowledge of the sufferings of her own people—the poor—she was irresistible. But much as her persuasive personality counted in so far as it inspired confidence in the workers when she approached them, it would not have been enough without Mr. Bosc's acumen and professional help. The project was hers, but it was under Mr. Bosc's direction that she worked it out. He showed her how to place it on a proper business footing, and it was thanks to him that she returned to London with practically the whole most important part of the lace trade in her own hands.

The expedition was no pleasure jaunt, the strain on body and mind had been severe and incessant, but the result should have been eminently satisfactory, yet it was not—from Ella's point of view. She had really accomplished the thing that she had set out to accomplish, a part of her purpose in life, and by means which would have served her equally well in any like matter. But they were not the means upon which she had determined as the best. The superstition that power comes of social position was innate in her, and had been fostered by every influence that had been brought to bear upon the formation of her mind. She had no conception of the superior com-

pelling force of personality. She was like a wayfarer who has stumbled upon the right path but does not recognise it. Her mind's eye was set on a royal road, and all that she had done so far she thought of as only by the way, a kind of marking time. Once having seen a way to the attainment of her ends, and having set out to pursue it, she would have thought it mere weakness to allow herself to be diverted to the consideration of other means as better for her purpose; and she returned to London with her mind still uneasily busy with the problem which began to torment her, when it became necessary to close her Exhibition—the problem of how to attract the crowd back to her showroom. She did not foresee that her recent activities could help in any way to solve the problem. In fact, her success promised rather to work against her interests in this direction, for her business now would be chiefly wholesale, and it was only on the retail part of it that she could calculate to bring back her special *clientèle* and give her the opportunity she desired to make acquaintance with the mind of that section of society in which she meant eventually to play a leading part. To fit herself in all respects for this part when she should come to play it, she believed to be the real business of her life at this time, the purpose for which the position she was in had been made for her.

In the train during one of their long journeys, she approached Mr. Bosc on the subject of her fears. "How am I to attract people to my showroom now?" she began abruptly. "What am I to do if nobody comes?"

Mr. Bosc was about to open a French newspaper but suspended the action. "You will have no need of private clients now," he said.

"Lace must be kept to the fore, must be made the rage," Ella rejoined, "else there will be no demand for it."

"Your exhibition has helped to do that," he reminded her kindly.

"Only helped," she answered. "Purveyors of fashion are not making lace 'the thing' just now, and in any case I have nothing to expect from them but opposition. I must have Society on my side to fight the retailers by setting up a demand for real lace."

Mr. Bosc laid his paper aside, took out his notebook, and made a note.

Ella waited till he closed the book, then broke out again.

"Some attraction is imperative," she insisted. "What does Society care about most?"

"Amusement," Mr. Bosc answered laconically. "The mind of Society craves for distraction. 'What are we going to do to pass the time?' is the incessant question. Success in Society means being whirled from one disconnected event to another in an ever-growing state of fatigue. It is a treadmill round of so-called gaieties, which excite but give little pleasure and no satisfaction; an idle, useless, purposeless existence rushing at express speed to its doom, extinction. For no soul can survive without nourishment, and in such a life only the body is cared for; the stomach is greedily filled to repletion, but heart and soul are starved. Self is the god of Society, and inclination its only law. Starved hearts cannot cater for the food of the spirit, which is love, so the soul is doomed to die of inanition."

"You don't help me," Ella complained. "I don't care to be the keeper of Society's soul. Society is my tool, and I must have the handling of it for my own good purpose. Surely you allow that my purpose is good!"

"Yes," he said slowly. "I allow that your purpose is good. But to your question, 'What does Society care about most?' I can only give you the one concise answer, amusement."

"Oh!" Ella exclaimed. "Are you going to suggest a skating-rink like Mr. Strangworth, or a tea-room and tableaux?"

Mr. Bosc in appearance preserved his professional neutrality. He jotted down another note, put his pocketbook in his pocket, and answered deliberately, taking up his newspaper as he spoke: "I make no suggestion at all."

Having spoken, he unfolded the paper, sank back in his corner of the carriage, and retired into himself. Ella knew from experience that it was useless to persist. Mr. Bosc, neutral as a fish, was always a trial to her patience, and on this occasion he fairly exasperated her. She was never violent herself either in language or action, but if somebody had been there at the moment to shake Mr. Bosc for her, it would have been a relief to her feelings.

It did not follow, however, that, because he forbore to make any suggestion at all to her, he was not going to move in the matter. Far into that night, after their long journey, he sat up in his room, with his notebook open before him, writing letters by the feeble light of one candle, on the text she had

given him, "Lace must be made the rage"; and the gist of each letter was a practical suggestion as to how this might be done.

2

Once more the door of the Corner House stood invitingly open. Beveridge loitered in the hall, or sunned himself out on the steps, or even ventured to sit a little to rest his feet while he glanced at the newspaper. Pecky Tim, on tiptoe, peeped about. The Argus-Eyed, seated at the receipt of custom, alternately plied her crochet-needle and told her beads. She would begin deliberately with the needle, but, gradually, her mind becoming perturbed as time passed and no customers came, she got up speed, until at last she seemed to be crocheting for a wager, which apparently she always lost; for she would suddenly drop her work in her lap, like one who gives it up, sigh deeply, and, concealing her rosary with the flap of her desk, the beads dropping through her fingers the while, she would Hail Mary with quickly moving lips to the intent that Our Lady would be pitiful and help. Send customers! It wasn't much to ask the Queen of Heaven!

Miss Hildenborough sometimes joined in this pious exercise, sometimes she busied herself about the room, straightening rugs, dusting cabinets, sorting their contents, doing her best to make work for herself in order to salve her conscience, which was sensitive about taking a salary for doing nothing.

When Miss Hildenborough and Mrs. Pilbeam spoke together it was in low tones, their eyes upon the close-drawn curtains covering the deep window recess, as if someone were sick there whom they feared to disturb.

"How's she feeling, d'you suppose?" Miss Hildenborough asked the Argus-Eyed, towards the end of a fruitless week. "Desperate?"

"Not if I know her at all!" the Argus-Eyed gallantly rejoined.

"Supposing she's beat?"

Mrs. Pilbeam slightly shrugged her shoulders. "Well," she said, "if it is so it is so, and will be was it ever so, Miss Hildenborough. But she's not one to be beat, isn't our Miss Banks. She'd call in the devil rather."

"Law, Mrs. Pilbeam!" Miss Hildenborough exclaimed. "How you do talk!"

But she moved away enlivened by Mrs. Pilbeam's naughtiness, and made work for herself as if the person Mrs. Pilbeam had mentioned had come in of his own accord to drive her.

The afternoon sun looked into the beautiful bare room—bare of anything that could spoil its perfect proportions; the hanging lustres sparkled and flashed a welcome to the light, the cut-glass pendants responded in rainbow tints; deep down in the polished floor, walls and ceiling repeated themselves, and all about, gilding gleamed and colour brightened. Mrs. Pilbeam, her sight dazzled by the shining expanse, thought of the blessed saints:

Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea,

and heard in her heart the hymning of the heavenly choir: *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,* and was overcome by a wave of fervent spiritual emotion. She shut her eyes the better to hear and see—"Shut them only for a moment, I do assure you, Miss Hildenborough," as she afterwards explained—and when she opened them again, there stood Mr. Strangworth and Lady Janet Brastaby right in the centre of the glassy sea, for all the world as if they had just been spirited in and set down there; for she couldn't believe that they'd come in by the door without her hearing, "not was it ever so." There they were, however, colloquing, with Miss Hildenborough awaiting their pleasure, at a distance, delicately, so as not to interrupt their conversation; and blesséd be God and His angels and His saints, for if ever there was an answer to prayer, there stood that answer in the persons of those two. "Harbingers was what came into my mind," the Argus-Eyed concluded, "and harbingers they were, you'll see, Miss Hildenborough."

They had looked for Ella in her sitting-room first, and Mr. Strangworth, having the right of way by reason of Ella's confidence in him, had taken Lady Janet through the sitting-room into the showroom, which is how it was that the Argus-Eyed did not hear them enter. Lady Janet, a slim, attractive figure in her plain black cloth tailor-made coat and skirt and white lace blouse, stood looking about her in surprise. Nature, with her prematurely grey hair, and art, with the black and white of her costume, were doing their best to soften her fair young

face, but cynicism, the outcome of sadly acquired knowledge of the worldly side of life,—a gradual accretion which threatened destruction to the natural goodness of her heart—hardened the expression of her mouth. Her eyes had escaped as yet, and were still quick to respond sympathetically when her better nature was appealed to.

"Here's a change!" she exclaimed. "What does it mean?"

"A new departure," Mr. Strangworth supposed.

"Well, if the departure is in the same taste, I shall be for applauding it," Lady Janet declared.

"You approve, then?"

"I should think so! Why, it's—oh, give me the word!"

"Stately?"

"Yes, and more also. Who is responsible?"

"Ella Banks."

"Ella Banks," Lady Janet slowly repeated, her eyes wandering about the room. "Is she responsible for her own sitting-room also?"

"She is."

"And what is your word for that?"

"A qualified word, dignified simplicity."

"If our surroundings, when we are responsible for them, are, as some say, an expression of ourselves, I see a contradiction."

"How so? Stateliness is compatible with dignified simplicity. You must have seen royal robes worn with dignified simplicity. There are appropriate outward trappings for all occasions. The use of them only shows conformity to custom, which is a social virtue, the outcome of good feeling. To answer in good taste to the expectation of the eye is communal politeness; to offend, is the height of communal ill-breeding."

"Don't go on," she said laughingly. "The complexity of human nature——"

"But there is no complexity in human nature if you take the trouble to study it," he interrupted. "Human nature is a compound of various ingredients, each one of which has its use and its danger. The danger lies in the amount, too little or too much of any one ingredient. But even the poisonous ingredients may be used beneficently to tonic up the whole system. Moral muscles must be braced to resist poisonous effects, and the effort strengthens. The difficulty is to gauge the proportion in which the ingredients are present in any one human being. But if we set ourselves to the task we can rec-

tify the mixture. We have an inward consciousness of the measure of our own ingredients, and can increase or eliminate at will, or, at all events, modify. By taking thought, the poison, selfishness, can't be rectified on principle, eliminated by love. The affections are the thing best worth cultivating in this world. Keep a soft, warm heart, well fed with pity, and a head bent on understanding, and you will find life with all its trials well worth having."

"But do any of us wilfully starve our hearts?" Lady Janet deprecated.

"I ask *you*, Lady Janet," Mr. Strangworth replied.

Lady Janet turned from him, and in the act caught sight of Ella emerging from her curtained recess, and advanced to meet her with outstretched hand.

Greetings over, Ella raised anxious eyes to Mr. Strangworth. "No one has come near me," she mourned, "and I am forbidden to do anything myself."

"And you have no faith in your friends!" he reproached her.

"It will soon be 'Save me from my friends!' I can tell you," Lady Janet put in. "Poor dear! We ought to have told you sooner! You've been in agonies of suspense, I can see. Cheer up! You're going to have lots to do. To begin with, here you are comfortably established in your own house, and it is high time you entertained your friends. You are to give a party. You are to request the honour of our company. You are to be At Home to us. We'll go to your sitting-room now, and have tea, and block out the whole programme, subject to your approval. Your part on the occasion will be to look beautiful and talk—to set the talk going. *Lace is to be brought to the fore! Lace is to be made the rage!* And for that there is nothing like talk!"

So Ella learnt that the Influence which had done and could do so much for her had never been withdrawn, and was now at work again carrying into effect her own words, pressing the button which set the machinery in motion. Ella found herself controlled by its mechanism, not directing but conforming. "Just be ready yourself," was Lady Janet's parting injunction, "and leave the rest to us."

Society, treated like a flock of sheep, is easily shepherded in any direction. The Princess Anna had but to wave her crook, and well-trained dogs enough for the purpose sprang to attention, ready to do her bidding. She let it be known that she

meant to honour Ella Banks with her company on Wednesday the 27th inst., at four o'clock. This would have been enough to attract a considerable following, but she meant to collect the whole flock. To accomplish this, mysterious rumours were set afloat. There was a suggestion that something extraordinary was toward. Mr. Harkles, best of sheep dogs, stroked and patted by Lady Janet, and given the word, "A surprise to be sprung," set off, joyously yapping, and did his work well. He not only barked himself but he set the other dogs barking, and caused a ferment in the Land and Leisure Club. The rounding-up of the flock was accomplished in no time, Society was headed off as one sheep in the direction of the Corner House, and the scramble to get in became general.

Mrs. Filmer Dabbs bell-wethered her section of the "Money Gang" with a will. And it must be said for Mrs. Dabbs, that she was an ally worth securing when there was anything to be done. "Set the Dabbs woman going somehow," was the order, and Lady Janet, knowing her woman, inscribed on the invitation she sent to Mrs. Dabbs, *"To meet H.R.H. The Princess Anna."* Mrs. Dabbs was for making the most of the honour. She spent herself, her time and her money on giving an entertainment, and used the occasion to display the card in a prominent position. This she did for the double purpose of promoting conversation on the subject of the Cause she was engaged on espousing, and of, at the same time, showing her friends where she was in "High Society." The card, however, mysteriously disappeared at the outset of the entertainment, and was not recovered until Lady Coombes, who had arrived among the first, took her departure last of all.

"I found this lying about," she said, giving Mrs. Dabbs the card, "and just slipped it into a book out of sight. I knew you'd not like people to suppose that you were proud of it, my dear. You're not that sort of person, I hope. Middle-class women are not boastful whatever their faults, and it is hard to be misunderstood."

3

The winter's day closed in suddenly. It was dark before Ella's party began to assemble, and the candles had to be lighted. Mr. Bosc stayed till they burnt up, took a last look round, and then retired—to come in again with the crowd, an obscure

looker-on. His task was done and he regretted it, although it had been a hard task. But while he was in command Ella was safe, and that was all he cared for. Now, alas, she was bordering on a phase over which he would have no command, and there was nothing for it but to step aside and leave her to her own imperious devices. He might watch over her, but he could not hope to influence her. He knew her too well for that. If she would only consult him! But she never would—at least for the purpose of acting on his advice. If she expected interference she would be secretive until after the event, and then open enough, but what was the good of that if her judgment had been at fault? Mr. Bosc sighed and shook his head. As he turned to go, his face was twitching painfully. What he dreaded, though he would not acknowledge it, even to himself, was that sooner or later, in some one important particular, her judgment would be fatally at fault.

Mrs. Pilbeam and Miss Hildenborough were first in their places: Mrs. Pilbeam at her high desk, Miss Hildenborough standing beside it. Ella was accustomed to think of them as always there. In the night she imagined them as waxwork figures, to which sense and feeling only returned at intervals as required. This saved the situation from all irksomeness either to them, or to her on their account.

The enchantment of the scene, the silence and the solitude, stirred in Miss Hildenborough a sense as of hallowed ground threatened with desecration.

"My, but it *is* fine!" she said softly. "Seems a sin to let people in to spoil it all!"

"It would be fine for us if they didn't come, Miss Hildenborough!" the Argus-Eyed rejoined ironically.

"I feel," Miss Hildenborough began, then faltered—— "If there was an altar there on the daïs," she recommenced, "and flowers and candles and music, and holy nuns kneeling about——" Again she stopped short, blushing and confused.

"That's how you feel it——" Mrs. Pilbeam was beginning sarcastically, but felt it herself as she spoke, and was checked. "It does seem a pity," she added regretfully.

"When it's so grand and lofty and empty and still, like a church," Miss Hildenborough tried again, valiantly struggling with difficulties of expression.

"It's a pity to let in the world," the Argus-Eyed helped her out, sighing sympathetically.

"Hush, she's coming!" Miss Hildenborough warned her.

"Like the cuckoo in the clock, out she pops on the stroke of the hour, cuckoo!" said the Argus-Eyed.

"She walks in beauty!" Miss Hildenborough was enlivened to exclaim.

"I allow she's a picture," the Argus-Eyed conceded.

Very occasionally there comes a woman whose beauty admits of no dispute. It creates an atmosphere which there is no resisting. Men grow soulful in the presence of such beauty; women, it animates. Ella at her best had this effect, and to-day she was at her best. Her dress—adapted eighteenth century, designed to show how lace should be worn—was an old-world, soft, satiny brocade, tinted with rose of the faintest shade on which lace could show itself, and draped to her figure so that it seemed a part of herself, the making of her as petals are the making of a flower. She wore no jewels and needed none. Standing there in the soft radiance of the candlelight, she might well have been a reincarnation of the first young hostess who took a last look at her newly-finished ballroom before the arrival of her guests.

The Argus-Eyed and Miss Hildenborough welcomed her appearance with discreet applause. Ella laughingly bobbed them a curtsey.

"Law, Miss Banks!" the Argus-Eyed exclaimed, still softly clapping her hands. "You are a gel, I do believe, after all."

"What is it you have been mistaking me for then?" Ella wanted to know.

The Argus-Eyed considered the question for a moment, her eyes intent upon Ella. "Ask me another, Miss Banks," she said at last. "I know what I mean, but there! I can't put it into words."

Ella laughed. "Isn't my floor a dream?" she said.

"Yes," the Argus-Eyed rejoined. "It's a floor for fairy feet in satin slippers, an' no mistake."

"It's a pity to spoil it, but the World must come in," Ella answered lightly, though with a pang in her heart. She would have scouted Miss Hildenborough's pious impulse to dedicate the place to sacred purposes because it was beautiful; all the same, it was a shrine—her own shrine, capable of desecration. By nature exclusive, she would fain have chosen her company, and kept out the vulgar crowd. But there was her purpose: "Lace must be kept to the fore."

Mr. Strangworth had sent his string-band to play the World into a melting mood. The men seated in the musicians' gallery were tuning their instruments. There was a commotion in the hall, and Beveridge ran in with the warning: "They're coming, my lady."

Ella hastened to her post on the right of the door, only just in time—and that thanks to Pecky Tim, of whom she had a glimpse as she crossed the doorway, interviewing the first arrivals, two tall ladies, whom he had taken it upon himself to hold up in the absence of Beveridge, by insisting on inspecting their cards. "Cos," as he explained, "superstitious persons are allus a-tryin' of it on, and there isn't any knowin'."

The ladies, elaborately dressed would-be's, just getting into the swim, entered the room with self-assertive dignity, passed Ella with a haughty stare, and stood a little apart, consulting. Ella took no notice of them, and they decided to show her that they were accustomed to proper attention. For this purpose they approached her.

"We have come to meet the Princess," one of them explained. "Meanwhile, you can show us some lace."

With a glance Ella turned them over to Miss Hildenborough, who immediately stepped forward with, "What can I have the pleasure of showing you, Muddum?"

They stared at Miss Hildenborough. "We'll wait," one of them snapped, then turned to the other. "Lady de Lace gives herself airs," she said, without troubling to lower her voice.

"So should I with that face and figure," the other rejoined. "And, oh, do look at her dress! Isn't it, now, isn't it, just! It's something to be the Duchesse de Dentelle!"

Ella stood at her post impassive in appearance. This was her battlefield, the lists were set, she was ready for the encounter, and fearless. Let the enemy jibe!

Mockery is the fume of little minds.

Mrs. Filmer Dabbs arrived next, with her son, her two daughters, and a large party—"Having been asked to come early," as she informed her friends, who understood from her manner that the request was an honour from on high which might be mentioned with reserve but could not with good taste be particularised. She said "Good-afternoon," to Ella condescendingly as she passed, the others stared, with the exception of Filmer

junior, who was prepared to shoot an ogling glance, but, on meeting Ella's eyes, cast down his own and bowed involuntarily; and the younger Miss Dabbs, who timidly ventured to smile by way of greeting, and then blushed for having dared in the face of public opinion.

Others of the same group followed, all determined to keep the Lace Girl in her place and show their own superiority by ignoring her. They drew together, with Mrs. Filmer Dabbs as their centre of attraction, and soon the room was ringing with their loud-voiced chatter.

Presently Lady Coombes came in alone, and shook hands with Ella. The shock of this familiarity caused a momentary hush in the talk.

"That's to show her independence," said Mrs. Filmer Dabbs, and it was felt that Lady Coombes's show of independence was deplorable.

They were grouped on Ella's left, Lady Coombes passed on to her right. Miss Hildenborough followed her with jingling keys, and they were presently seen to have their heads together over the contents of a Boulle cabinet.

"She's stealing a march on you, mother," Miss Filmer Dabbs guessed. "She evidently means business."

"Just like her," said Mrs. Dabbs, and again it was felt that Lady Coombes's taste was deplorable.

Lord Terry de Beach arrived on his Julius's arm. They had been paying a call in the near neighbourhood of the Corner House, and walked thence together. As they turned into the street, a band playing an enticing tune came marching towards them. Lord Terry straightened himself and stepped out.

"D—d good idea, that of old Strangworth's," he remarked. "One, two, one, two," he pounded out on the pavement. "Puts some spring into your step, hey, my Julius?"

"What idea of old Strangworth's?" his Julius asked, all at sea.

"Why, good gad, music to march to, of course!"

"But how is music to march to old Strangworth's idea? March music was played long before Strangworth was born."

"Or you either, old as you are," Lord Terry chuckled. "Quite right, my Julius. I shouldn't have said it was Strangworth's idea."

Mr. Harkles detected evasion in this ready agreement, Lord Terry was keeping something back, therefore there must be two

and two to be put together. Mr. Harkles had already observed that Gregor Strangworth's intimate friends were severely reticent when anything that concerned him was under discussion. They never voluntarily gave any information about him. All that was known outside his own immediate circle had been discovered by very slow degrees, and mostly by accident.

The band reached the Corner House, marked time to the end of a phrase, stopped playing, right-about turned, scattered, and disappeared. "There is Strangworth on the steps waiting for us," Lord Terry remarked.

Mr. Harkles jumped to a conclusion. Strangworth and the band, of course! How singular! The times that he had heard the band and at the same time seen Strangworth, and never, before Lord Terry made that slip about Strangworth's "idea," had the two been connected in his mind! He paused to find an excuse with which to salve his *amour propre* for such an oversight. Mr. Strangworth, being a sane man, would anyone have suspected the connection? Mr. Harkles inwardly cursed the apparent agreement between the men to whose acquaintance he aspired, to keep to themselves anything that they knew about Strangworth. More than once already he had been betrayed into showing surprise, a thing he conceived to be humiliating to a man-of-the-world, but this time he flattered himself that he had escaped the danger.

"Strangworth always seems to me d—d ridiculous with his band," he said.

"How 'd—d ridiculous'?" Lord Terry roared at him, dropping his arm, and stopping short. "Hasn't he every right to have his band out when he wants to walk? Why shouldn't he be invigorated by music if he likes it? It's a free country. He has the courage of his opinions. Strangworth's his own law in matters of taste, doesn't care a damn what anybody thinks—*ergo,* we all think well of him. Out of hell there isn't a better fellow than Strangworth."

Mr. Harkles shifted his ground. "For a man who is by way of being religious, Strangworth doesn't seem to be exactly self-denying," he observed ironically.

"My Julius, our Gregor lives like a poor man compared to the way he might be living, if he spent his income on himself."

"Then he must be rolling," sighed Mr. Harkles, greatly impressed. "Oh, money! money! what might not one do for the good of the world if one but had the money!" he added piously.

"All's for the best, my Julius," the Terrier chuckled. "Your good angel knows what *you'd* do with money if you had it, and knocks out of the devil's hand the millions he'd fain bestow on you."

"I'm richer than millionaires in general, then, since I have a good angel," Mr. Harkles riposted. The Terrier considered this, and decided patronisingly that it was not so bad for his Julius.

They entered the showroom with Mr. Strangworth. All three shook hands with Ella, and stood talking to her. Callowabbey, Ballard and Sarb, The O'Haleron, and other members of the Land and Leisure Club entered in twos and threes. To some of these Ella held out her hand as to acquaintances; others were introduced and bowed. They ranged themselves behind her.

The Money Gang on the other side viewed these proceedings with disapproval. "But what can you expect?" they asked each other. "A girl like that! She's bound to be on easy terms with the men!" They allowed that she was discreet, that was her artfulness; but as to her being any better than she should be if the truth were known, tell that to your maiden aunt! The poor Princess, how she did get taken in!

Mrs. Filmer Dabbs spied Lady Callowabbey in the hall, accompanied by several other distinguished-looking ladies and gentlemen. "There's Lady Callowabbey, there's Lady Callowabbey," she repeated again and again, turning to one and another to let them know the extent of her acquaintance. "And that's the old Duchess of Dollars with her, and Lady Agneta Parlington, and old Lord Bowater."

"Mother, you know everybody!" Miss Dabbs exclaimed. "Who's the tall, thin, red-haired girl in black? She does look aristocratic!"

"Oh, she's on our Committee," Mrs. Dabbs replied, off-hand. "It's the Countess of Cruxhaven."

Lady Callowabbey advanced smiling, and shook hands with Ella, and all her party did likewise.

The Argus-Eyed and Miss Hildenborough, who had returned to her post by the desk, had been boiling with indignation at the treatment their Miss Banks was receiving at the hands of "that lot."

"But it's just what you might expect of the half-and-halfs," said the Argus-Eyed. "They never know where they are, and

daren't do anything off their own bat, or if they do, it's the wrong thing."

Upon the entrance of Lady Callowabbey's party, she exchanged significant smiles with Miss Hildenborough and leant back in her chair, satisfied. "When High Society chooses, it can do things handsome," she observed, "and High Society is out to support our Miss Banks."

A little lady fluttered in, black eyes sparkling, gipsy face all animation, a spruce knight in close attendance. She seized Ella by both hands, and was heard to exclaim: "You dear! You de-ar!"

"That's the Marchioness of Ballard and Sarb," fell from Mrs. Dabbs, in a joyless tone. She was like one who affects composure in the face of disaster. The Money Gang, in consternation, was down upon her, attacking and reproaching. Why hadn't she warned them that this was going to be a Reception?

Mrs. Dabbs didn't know herself, she confessed—honestly, as was her conquering policy when in a difficulty. "You never know what's what in High Society," she complained, "or what's going to be what. There's never any knowing what they'll do next. I don't believe they know themselves. Nothing's ever done twice the same. Last time none of them shook hands with her, so how was I to know that it would be the thing to do to-day?"

"I wanted to if you would have let me," the youngest Miss Dabbs averred. "I like her. And Lady Ann Brabant always shook hands when she came for her lesson."

"Oh, you!" her mother rejoined with asperity. "Who's to know that you're right when you are? You'd shake hands with a crossing-sweeper, and kiss a chimney-sweep for his mother. You've no proper pride. It's a mystery how ever I came to have such a gel."

Just then people who passed without greeting Ella were pouring in, and she stood eyeing them absently, her thoughts far away, with her own folk, on the little farmstead, her early home.

There was a cleavage between the Society sheep and the half-and-half goats. Society had ranged itself on the right, the would-be's continued to drift to the left. Ella, tied to the spot, had the benefit of the conversation that went on immediately behind her.

"What's the procedure?" a lady asked, in a hard, incisive voice.

"I don't know. Sorrow is soon enough when it comes," a gentler, bored voice replied.

"There's Maud B. and S. Looks sprightly. Where's Col Drindon?" the first speaker went on.

"Oh, hunting or shooting or something somewhere," the gentler voice replied. "That combine is over and done for, you know."

"He's gone to mend his broken heart, I suppose."

"Not at all. He shunted her."

"Well, she's soon consoled herself, apparently. Who's her new man?"

"Can't see."

"Her husband's speaking to her. They're greeting each other with all the effusion of old friends who seldom meet."

A commotion in the hall attracted general attention.

"H.R.H. at last!" the hard voice exclaimed. "And in quaker grey! Not a yell of colour for once, on my word! Wonders will never cease, she looks like a lady!"

On her entrance, the Princess capped the climax of cordiality. By way of giving Ella a pat of encouragement she brought her heavy hand down whack on Ella's shoulder as she rose from her curtsey. The weight of this unexpected caress disturbed Ella's balance and spoilt the grace of her obeisance, but she managed to stagger upright again, and the effect was as when a king knights a hero on the field of battle, only it was the honour of ladyhood which the Princess's accolade was held to have conferred.

"*Wunderkind!*" the Princess exclaimed, then spying Mr. Strangworth, she made for him, and they stood together apart, talking, for some time.

In the pause the Duke of Castlefield Saye came hurrying in, like one late for an engagement. He bent over Ella's hand, pressing it warmly. It was their first meeting since her return. "Had to see you through, my dear," he jerked out. "Felt I must see you safely through, you know. Glad to see you again, too. Very."

He had never before appeared in her showroom in public, and his coming now was unexpected. The colour flew to Ella's face, she could not command that, but she suppressed all other sign of emotion. In spite of her peasant blood—or possibly

because of it—she had in perfection that finest finishing touch of gentlehood, gentlewomanly self-control.

"Did you see that?" Mr. Harkles whispered to Lord Terry excitedly.

"I saw nothing remarkable," the Terrier answered drily.

"Didn't you see her colour?"

"I have often observed her colour. It comes and goes on the slightest provocation," Lord Terry de Beach answered, stiff as buckram.

"Well, if you live, you will see that I am right about them," Mr. Harkles declared triumphantly.

Lord Terry winced at this tactless allusion to the uncertainty of life, and turned his back on the persistent *parvenu*. But he was still intent on converting his Julius by means of the Bible and bad language, and determined now to make it hot for him at the next convenient moment. If old Ninny had any game on, it was not for Mr. Harkles to pry. He must be kept in his place.

The Duke looked about, and seeing Lady Coombes sitting apart alone on the other side of the room, crossed over to her.

The voices behind Ella, questioning and commenting, again became audible. The O'Haleron's rich brogue and the Sliver's cracked falsetto now joined in with the other two. The Sliver had been furtively dodging about ever since he came, eyes and ears open, on the lookout for corrupt matter with which to store his nasty little mind for the enrichment of his conversation at the Club later on. His kind was still in request, but the reaction against them, which set in fully at the end of the century, was already beginning.

"Lady Coombes is trying to capture the Duke," Harsh Voice remarked casually.

"The Duke is trying to capture Lady Coombes, more likely," Soft Voice had it. "All London is after her since she refused to be patronised by H.R.H."

"She's a snob inverted," Harsh Voice had it. "More offensive in its way than the right-side-out thing, since it doesn't flatter *us*."

"If you like! At any rate, she's a novelty, and novelties are rare. The inversion shows character."

"'I'm an honest woman,' eh?"

The Sliver eagerly asked for an explanation.

"Oh, haven't you heard?" Hard Voice rejoined. "At the

famous interview when Dick Greaterex went down on his knees——"

"Dick embroiders," Soft Voice interrupted.

"To beg her to consent to receive the Princess, she thought he was making love to her——"

"An obvious piece of embroidery," Soft Voice again interrupted.

"Oh," Harsh Voice broke off, "you've no feeling! It's positively barbarous to throw cold water on the story of the moment, and spoil a laugh. Where's the Duchess? I thought this was her concern?"

"The Duke has come in her stead, I should think. She's gone to the Riviera with Ann."

"A month before everybody else?"

"Ann was ordered abroad. She is out of health."

"Oh, tell that!" Harsh Voice exclaimed. "It is convenient to put it down to Ann! But you know what they say? The Duchess hates the Winged Victory, and wild horses won't drag her here again. That's her mistake. It is safest to keep your eye on the enemy."

"You believe that story? I don't," Soft Voice answered. "Too great a risk."

Ella wondered who the ladies were. The O'Haleron gave her the information. "See what I've picked up?" he said. "Is it yours, Princess Taxidos?"

Harsh Voice answered no.

"Yours, then, Lady Cruxhaven?"

Soft Voice said it was, and thanked him.

"I believe he is dotty enough for anything," Princess Taxidos resumed. "You know about the picture, his grandmother, or great-grandmother, or somebody? Fancy covering up a superb Gainsborough!"

"No, does he?" the Sliver exclaimed.

"Yes, with a curtain——"

"Like the Japanese," Lady Cruxhaven observed. "He is quite right. Seeing a picture every day spoils one's sense of its beauty."

"But the Japanese have theirs out to be looked at. The Duke won't show his. The old Duchess of Dollars went down to Castlefield on purpose to see it, when she heard that he wasn't by way of showing it——"

"So like her," Soft Voice commented.

"And he wouldn't let her see it. Said he'd sent it to be cleaned. She said she'd go and have a look at it at Colnaghi's if it were there——"

"Vulgar persistency." The stronger the words, the softer drawled the voice.

"He said by all means. But it wasn't there—never had been."

"He was quite right not to let the Duchess of Dollars in to desecrate the shrine he worships at."

"Worships—his grandmother! Well, that's one way of taking it. But I call it dotty. The Brabants are all queer."

"*Her* R.H. is giving Mr. Strangworth a good dose of herself," the Sliver observed. "*His* R.H. should look out."

"It is not look out but get out with him—when he is made to feel in the way," Harsh Voice evenly rejoined.

"That picture, now, you were speaking of," The O'Haleron harked back. "Ye're all wrong about it. It isn't the Juke's grandmother at all, nor yet a Gainsborough. It's a portrait of Gregor Strangworth by Vandyke——"

There was a chorus of laughing exclamations.

"True as I'm standing here," The O'Haleron asseverated. "Ye think it's impossible? Did ye ever hear of the Rosicrucians? Well, thin, ye know that they deal with the divil—saving your presence, ladies—and get a powerful long lease of life, and gold by the bushel, in return for their souls——"

"The Rosicrucians do not deal with the devil——" A gentlemanly voice this. Ella recognised it as Paul McAllen Ray's.

"Don't they now? Well, annyway, they deal with something that makes everybody very careful to humour them. Here's Mr. Harkles. Ask him."

"Ask me what?" The voice was Mr. Harkles's at its blandest.

"The O'Haleron is accusing Mr. Strangworth of being a Rosicrucian, centuries old," Harsh Voice explained.

"And confounding hermetic research with hierological lore," the gentlemanly voice added, with a touch of disdain.

"Rosicrucian?" Mr. Harkles queried.

"Sort of Free Mason, you know," The O'Haleron elucidated.

"What does The O'Haleron know of Free Masonry?" Mr. Harkles asked significantly.

"What do I know, is it?" The O'Haleron's voice grew aggressive. "There's an 'S' on the Gnostic Gems, isn't there? Substituted by the Arabs for *th*, a mispronunciation. In that

'S' and the *th* standing for it, lie all the mysteries of Masonry. A nod's as good as a wink to a blind man, and you're a Mason, Mr. Harkles."

A short silence, then Sliver's cracked falsetto broke facetiously: "Hello, papist, where have you been!"

There was a threat in The O'Haleron's steely blue eye which the Sliver did not like. "I mean," he stammered apologetically, "that coming from a Roman Catholic, what you have just said was unexpected——"

"Mr. Benjamin Hardwackle," The O'Haleron rejoined significantly, "I'll see you again by and by."

The Sliver's cracked falsetto was heard no more after that.

"There's Lord Terry de Beach," the hard voice exclaimed. "He'll know. He's hand-in-glove with Mr. Strangworth. Lord Terry!" she called. "Lord Terry, is Mr. Strangworth a Rosicrucian?"

"Princess," Lord Terry's corncrake voice rejoined, "that is a question which should not be asked, and must not be answered."

"How is that for a snub?" the careless hard voice asked generally.

4

Ella had desired to become acquainted with the mind of Society, and the section of Society represented by Princess Taxidos and Lady Cruxhaven had given her enough of its mind both to puzzle her and to make her indignant. She was puzzled as to why they should make her out to be an enemy of the Duchess's, indignant on the Duke's account; but she was too inexperienced and unsuspicious to be fully enlightened by anything that had been said. The more slanderous innuendoes she had not understood at all. She had heard enough though to destroy her pleasure in the occasion. Such mind as had been revealed to her appeared to be a very nasty mind, and if she could have made her escape she would; but she was pinned to the spot until there was a general move caused by the Princess suddenly heading for the daïs. The company falling apart to make way for her, she sailed up the room, cleaving a path for herself as a battleship cleaves the waters, her party following in her wake like lesser craft in attendance.

"We will all sit down, if you please, then we shall all be more comfortable," she gave out from the daïs in her platform voice.

Then there was a cry for chairs which set Ella quivering. Chairs on her glassy sea, hundreds of chairs, oh!—But she had no control of this part of the machinery which was working for her. Chairs were wanted, and chairs were fetched, a motley collection. The whole house was ransacked. She saw the Sliver bring in one from her bedroom—the Sliver, good heavens! In her bedroom—pollution! Even Mr. Harkles, regardless of gloves and at the risk of creasing his faultlessly fitting attire, wheeled in a chair for the harsh-voiced Princess Taxidos—from Ella's sitting-room, and it was the Duke's own chair, the one he always preferred. Mr. Harkles foraging in her sitting-room! She could have stamped! What a nightmare! Mr. Bosc should have foreseen that chairs would be wanted, and had the floor protected with felt.

But the scrimmage was soon over. The Princess smiled down on the company, and the company looked up at the Princess expectantly.

"Now, we are ready," she gave out, and beckoned to Ella, who had remained steadfast at her post, awaiting orders. "Come up and stand here beside me, then you will be seen. Somebody fetch her!" She looked round. Mr. Strangworth made a move, but it was the Duke's eye she caught. "If you please," she said.

The Duke made his way round the room, drew Ella's hand through his arm, and holding it pressed to his side, piloted her on to the daïs. The company took the liveliest interest in this part of the entertainment. Mr. Harkles actually stood up the better to see.

The Princess turned and looked admiringly at Ella, standing beside her, then she addressed the company. "You see now somesing that it iss very goot to see," she said genially. "But listen, and you will hear also somesing that it will be very goot for you to hear."

Ella stood facing her audience, calm in appearance, but with a thumping heart. The moment had come. All that the machinery she had set in motion could do for her, without her help, it had done; now she must take it in hand herself and direct it. A thought of her beautiful floor ("made for fairy feet in satin shoes"), all marred by those horrid chairs, floated through her mind; but save for that it was blank. Not a word could she utter.

The Duke from behind whispered: "Courage!"

The kindly great lady at her side looked up at her, divined her difficulty, and gave her a lead. "Begin at the beginning," she said. "Just tell zem zimply from ze beginning——"

Ella seized the clue. She had a beautiful voice, full and sweet, perfectly modulated after she found the pitch, and pathetic, a voice to touch the heart to tears. "Your Royal Highness, ladies and gentlemen," she began, "my first recollection which bears upon the subject of my trade, the art of lace-making, and upon the condition of the lace-workers in which your Royal Highness so graciously deigns to take an interest——" She paused. "My first recollection as I look back? It is a recollection that haunts me, sleeping and waking; a recollection that comes between me and all that I have to make life worth living—and I have a great deal; a recollection which makes me ashamed to be happy myself. Knowing, as I do, what misery is, and what my fellow-workers have to endure, I ask myself, Have I any right to be happy? And I answer myself, No! Not while there is one worker still to be rescued from the cruelties of men, from the callousness of women—from the lot which is death-in-life, a lingering death. My earliest recollection is of hunger and fatigue. Hunger—sometimes without even a crust to ease the craving; fatigue—without a hope of rest." She was checked a moment here by a stifled exclamation. Mr. Strangworth and the Princess exchanged rapid glances. The exclamation had been uttered by someone behind Ella. She knew who that someone was.

"This lace I wear, this beautiful fabric," she continued, picking up the piece on her dress and holding it out as she spoke, "this lace which is a treasure to the possessor, a joy to the beholder, is to me emblematic of suffering, and of the self-interest, callously indifferent to suffering, which is so prevalent a disgrace to our common humanity. I know that there are excuses for men. The animal instinct to live, and to protect the lives of those dependent upon them, presses them hard. So much cannot be said for women. It is vanity that hardens their hearts. The brutal callousness of women appears in nothing more surely than in the cruelties they countenance in order to obtain material for their own adornment." The faces of some three hundred women, who were looking up at Ella, grew hostile at these words, and she shifted her ground. "Doubtless this beautiful thing,"—she spread the diaphanous fabric out and fluttered it towards them—"has been steeped in tears, possibly

it cost the worker her sight. And, oh, the thoughts! The torturing thoughts, the agony of despair and pain of which it might tell could it but speak!—Recollections of a child who was taught the art with blows, who, when overpowered with the sleep of exhaustion, was roughly awakened with blows, and cruelly kept at work—with blows. Recollections of the young girl, grown up deformed by the hardships she suffered as a child, and kept at work by necessity in the foul air of some dark cellar, her health destroyed, robbed of all joy in life—recollection, it may be, of a succession of such girls, who each in turn took up the thread when it dropped forever from the flaccid fingers of her predecessor, and in turn wrought her life into the inch or two which was all that she had the strength to produce under such conditions. This lace of mine is old, old; but the conditions under which such a piece could be produced in these enlightened times in the majority of cases would be as bad as ever to this extent—the worker would still be in want, starving, unable to procure a living wage—to our shame; to the lasting shame of every woman who wears lace, knowing the truth, and troubling herself not at all to relieve the necessity, to come to the rescue of the workers, to save them from their living death."

From this preamble she passed on to practical details. She gave instances of hard cases, related tragic incidents, contrasted the profits of the sweater with the earnings of the sweated, the enhancement of the wearers' beauty with the destruction of the worker's; and ended with one of those simply worded appeals, the outcome of deep feeling which never fail of their effect.

The Princess set a good example by wiping her eyes with a pocket-handkerchief which was mostly lace.

"God pity the poor!" Mr. Strangworth ejaculated.

"God forgive us all!" Lord Imlac grimly responded.

These exclamations made applause impertinent. Ella slipped into the background, and her audience sat silent but not unmoved. The pursuit of their lives was emotional change, and she had moved them to compassion, a novel sensation, therefore enjoyable, therefore to be prolonged if possible.

The Princess stood up and spoke. "What we have to do," she said solemnly, "is to stop all this."

"How?" came eagerly from all parts of the room.

"We must support Ella Banks," she replied (*applause*). "Ella Banks has done a big thing (*applause*). She has rescued the

monopoly of the lace trade (*applause*), in the interest of the workers (*prolonged applause*), in order that she may have it in her power to pay them a living wage (*hurrah!*)—and more—(*pause, and breathless silence*) a proper share of the profits!"

At this announcement enthusiasm culminated in an outburst of applause which lasted a full minute.

"And this is what we can and must do to support Ella Banks," the Princess concluded, "and, mark you, it is not for her benefit. She takes no more profit for herself than she gives to any other worker (*hear, hear!*). What we must do ourselves, and induce all our friends to do, is to giff big orders at the shops for lace—talk lace—wear lace—set up a demand for lace. In a word, lace must be made the rage!"

The audience, rising, greeted this announcement with frantic applause, during which the Princess remained standing, and, at a sign from her, Ella was hustled to the front again. She stood with downcast eyes, composed and pale, not knowing what was expected of her.

"Say somesing," the Princess urged authoritatively.

From behind her, the dear voice prompted, "Express your thanks."

"Your Royal Highness, Ladies and Gentlemen," Ella faltered, "I would thank you all——" She stopped dead.

"*Ach, gut!* We are all thanked," Her Royal Highness exclaimed. "Now we will haff tea. Mr. Strangworth, where is that music you promised me?"

The question was a signal for the music to begin. The wide double-doors behind the daïs slid back, showing the suite of rooms beyond aglow with candlelight, decorated with flowers, set out with little tea-tables,—an inviting prospect, to judge by the rush which was immediately made for places. Society is always hungry. It will eat with the most despised of its entertainers only let him establish a reputation for giving good food. Music also has charms for the crowd as an accompaniment to eating. Food and music decided the day for Ella's project. It was over the tea-cups that the plan of campaign was drawn up, and under the excitement of music that volunteers enlisted for service.

5

When the Princess led the way to the tearoom, Ella stepped aside, and stood looking into the people's faces as they ap-

proached and passed her. She met eyes that glanced at her indifferently, eyes that stared curiously, eyes that were hostile, —and suddenly a great distaste for her position oppressed her. What was she in this crowd? What was the satisfaction of having had her way with it? She stood on her battlefield a conqueror, and should have felt elated. Why did she not feel elated? Why was what she did feel something like disgust with herself and everybody else? The answer is obvious to less material minds. Successes of the intellect end in disillusion; the only lasting joy of victory is a spiritual experience; but that Ella had yet to learn.

She was left long enough alone to feel herself deserted, uncared for, of no account; but in that she was mistaken. One anxious eye never lost sight of her, one sad, unsatisfied heart ached for her, one mind was set on making a place for her.

It was the Duke who passed the word to Lady Janet Brastaby by way of Mr. Strangworth. He was tied himself to attend on the Princess.

Lady Janet returned for Ella. "Come along, heroine," she said, in her off-hand, half-cynical, wholly friendly way, taking Ella's hand as she spoke, to pilot her towards the table at which the Princess was sitting. "'The Little Pilgrim goes up Higher!' You are to remain in close attendance on H.R.H. while she stays."

A place was made for Ella among a group of ladies and gentlemen standing behind the Royal Lady, cup and saucer and cake in hand.

"You're a wonderful girl, Ella Banks," Lady Janet rattled on; "but you made one mistake, 'the brutal callousness of women.' It was fine, but how could you? Women hold hard to the sweet, womanly delusion, and if you don't flatter them you'll have them all against you—eh, Lallah?" This to Lady Cruxhaven, who was listening.

"It was the ospreys in their hats!" Ella blurted out.

"What is wrong with ospreys?" Lady Cruxhaven softly drawled.

"In order to procure one, a mother-bird is slaughtered and a nest full of little ones left to starve," Mr. Strangworth answered her.

"Ah, yes, so I have heard! I remember. It seems a pity, but what is one to do? There is nothing quite like an osprey, you know." The soft, unimpassioned voice expressed detach-

ment. "I wish people would not tell us these things. I always wear ospreys." This she said as if it settled the question. "An ice, if you please," she added, in the same tone, handing her cup and saucer to Mr. Harkles, who was attending to her wants. "So you are going to reform us all, you dear thing?" she recommenced, addressing Ella.

Ella took it as a jest, and answered laughingly: "I am not Hercules!" her mind glancing at the strength necessary for such a task.

But those within hearing thought of Augean stables, and credited her with a neat score off "Red Ruin and the breaking-up of laws"—otherwise Lady Cruxhaven, according to Col Drindon, because of her Titian hair and her predatory habits.

Her Royal Highness rose at last, and way was made for her to pass out. Her progress was lengthy, she had something to say to so many people, made so many stoppages. Her loud, thick, platform voice was distinctly heard breaking the respectful silence with reiterated phrases. They might congratulate themselves on a most successful occasion. Enjoyable, too. So nice to see so many friends! And the music—"Mr. Strangworth, I want to hear more of your music. And I want to look at your lace, Miss Ella Banks. I haff no time to-day. But I shall come again. And I hope the music will come too. Couldn't we have it here once a week, Mr. Strangworth? Such an excellent place for chamber music! Once a week, yes? On the same day. Now we all know. *Auf Wiedersehen!*"

A few minutes later Ella stood alone amidst the horrid disorder of her battlefield. She gave Beveridge the necessary orders to have the room cleared. Pecky Tim had slipped in, and was playing leap-frog over the chairs. She called him to order irritably. The dissatisfied mood again possessed her. Her success was a sore disappointment. Her dancing feet were shod with lead.

At the door of her sitting-room she thought of her first opening day, of Col Drindon, and her own light-hearted refusal of his faded flower. She had to open the door for herself now, when she would have appreciated the slightest service. Not a soul remained. Even Mr. Bosc had deserted her—out of consideration for his mother, of course. Everybody had a mother, or somebody, waiting for them, their first consideration. The Argus-Eyed and Miss Hildenborough, at their tea, were doubt-

less enjoying each other's company. She only had nobody. And, oh, but it was lonely! lonely!

She felt for her handkerchief hastily.

"What, Ella, tears?" the kindliest voice in the world exclaimed as she entered the room.

The Duke stepped forward from the hearthrug.

She saw the kindliest face in the world full of concern. She saw protecting arms impulsively outstretched to her, and impulsively she flew to them for comfort.

"I was waiting to congratulate you, my dearest," he whispered, kissing her, and holding her close. "You are overwrought, poor child! A great strain. And those damned tongues! Poor brave child. There! the dear head on my shoulder. Have your cry out. Do you good—— My dearest! My dearest!"

6

The Duke of Castlefield Saye sat down that evening without appetite to a solitary dinner. He was annoyed with himself. But Ella in tears! Ella, brilliant, beautiful, sensitive—what could he do but comfort her?—Needn't have exposed his own feelings, though. You never know how Ella will take things. Rigid on the proprieties. Might question his right to dote on her.

"Eh, what?" to a dish at his elbow. "What's this? No. Here, bring it back!"

The Duke helped himself and glared at his plate.

Powdered heads were put together at the sideboard.

"What's the old man got now?" was the question.

"Lord knows! Give 'im another chaunce."

The Duke's plate was changed. The Duke took more kindly to another dish, to the extent of exploring the ingredients on his plate with his fork.

Happy?—No! Happy young women don't celebrate a brilliant success with tears. He had expected to see her radiant; no wonder he was upset—coming on top of that harrowing glimpse of her childhood. Strain for her, too. Painful, going over the old ground. Such suffering, poor child! And inevitable. Ann—the difference! Never a breath of cold air on Ann, morally or physically. Coddled. And couldn't hold a candle to Ella, poor Ann! Not a woman on earth to be com-

pared to Ella. Adorn any station. Splendid. What a mother for a race of men! Starved! Not always a crust with which to stay the craving of hunger. Damned injustice! "God pity the poor!" "God forgive us all!" Man's responsibility though. Cowardly to shirk it.

The Duke pushed his plate away, gulped down his wine, and left the room frowning. And dinner not half through!

Consternation in powdered heads at the sideboard. Mr. Purkis, the butler, impassive.

"Is 'e comin' back, Mr. Purkis?"

"Don't know where we are," said Mr. Purkis philosophically. "Time'll show. Wait and see. Your business to wait. Send for me if I'm wanted."

Powdered heads grinned at Mr. Purkis's edition of the ducal style. Mr. Purkis retired. Powdered heads beguiled the time with betting-books.

The Duke in his library sat at the writing-table, a miserable man.

Was there no securing her happiness in a position worthy of her beauty and talents? He'd done all he dared to do, and what did it amount to? There she was alone. Not an intimate, congenial soul to speak to. A young girl, quite alone, so far as proper companionship went. Trying to a man. Self-reliant, of course. Great self-control. In public. But in private what happened? Tears, he'd be bound. Secret, bitter tears. Too proud to show 'em. Hadn't expected to see him to-day. Surprised her. Expected the usual thing. Not a soul to speak to. Could talk to him and did. Girlishly. Conscious, though, of the gulf between them. "Your Grace." Couldn't be helped—at present. One of the public. Well, no. A friend. Wouldn't have reached out to the public across the gulf even in a moment of weakness. Wouldn't have clung to the public. Wouldn't have let herself go even if she had been caught. In tears. She believed in him. She trusted him—

But what would she think of him if she knew?—Should he take her into his confidence? He considered long, and then decided, no! Better not—not yet, at all events. Must, sooner or later. Better wait till she knew more of the world. Intolerance rubs off. And in the meantime? Well. No harm done. Go on just as usual. No more demonstrations of affection. No more tears, no more occasion.

Demonstrations quite explicable. She'd see that. Comforted

her like a child in trouble. Think it his way. Think it natural. Difference of age and all that sort of thing. Exceptional consequence of exceptional circumstance. Everything as usual again when she is as usual. She'll take it so, not a doubt of it. Nice-minded, always, in everything. Delicate. My dearest—

Mr. Purkis at his elbow. "Eh, what? What the devil do you want, Purkis? Do *I* want anything? No. Yes. Whisky and soda."

The Duke arose from his elliptical reflections and paced the room. Whisky and soda. Bucks you up. Must find something to do. Lots of things to look into. No good, though. Not in the mood. Look up fellows at the Club. Talk. Change the current of one's thoughts.

But the current of his thoughts drew him to the Corner House, and halted him there, looking up at a lighted window. "Like a young lover. Damned old fool! Go home. Read a novel. Get to bed."

7

But he was right in his estimate of probabilities. Ella had seen in his indiscretion nothing but an extra show of kindliness such as any respectable elderly gentleman might be permitted to make in like manner for the comfort of a girl-friend in distress, for whom he had a high regard; and she took it for granted that their intimacy should be resumed on the old footing. There was this difference, however. Henceforth the Duke kissed her by way of greeting, and it seemed to her right and natural that he should. She took it that he accepted her for a daughter-in-law, and that he returned the very strong affection that she felt for him. And, oh, the relief it was to think so! The comfort of his kiss! Her haunting doubt was at last resolved once for all. She was satisfied that he did know, that he did approve.

CHAPTER IV

COL IS MOVED BY THE SPIRIT

1

WHEN next Col Drindon appeared in the noisy little section of Society which he frequented, those of his acquaintances who

spoke politely said that he was not himself, and the rest asked, "What's he got?" But it was what he had not got that was the source of his discontent. He had just brought out a volume of poems in a key so different from that in which he had hitherto written that you could leave it throwing about anywhere for anybody to see, the result being that nobody in Smart Society wanted to see it. Therefore, Smart Society said that the book had fallen flat, and that that had given Col the hump. As it happened, no poems of Col's had ever been so much in demand; but as only Col himself, and his publishers, and some few thousands of people of whom Smart Society had never heard, were aware of this fact, Smart Society was satisfied that it knew why Col Drindon was not himself.

The subject of the moment which was effervescing in the conversation of the Land and Leisure Club on his arrival was again Ella Banks. "The Winged Victory has scored another success, a double score this time. She's pulled off a big *coup* in the way of business, and got a footing in Society as well. Her Wednesday At-Homes are packed; and with the right people, too," was the news that greeted him. The betting on the one hand was that Ella would step into a duchy next, but on the other it was objected that she had already won a duke with a stumble which rendered her unsound, and disqualified her for the duchy stakes. Mr. Harkles nursed the suggestion of a stumble, but Lord Terry de Beach would none of it. He knew old Ninny, and that wasn't the way he did things.

Col Drindon returning to his flat one afternoon discovered that it was stuffy, discovered that there was too much in it, that it was chock-full of rubbish that only got in his way. He kicked some of the rubbish out of the way, and flung the windows wide open. They overlooked the park, which was empty at that hour. The wintry air flowed in, tainted London air, humid and flat, chilling to the marrow, cold without freshness, and uninvigorating.

He rang the bell.

"I'll have a mutton chop and boiled potatoes for dinner," he said to the man who answered it. A small, dark, imperturbable-looking little man, with a high, narrow head; "and—yes—and beer."

"I have the menoo here, sir," the man replied, offering him a card.

"Oh, to the devil with the menu!" Col exclaimed irritably.

"I'm sick of confections of every kind, made-up things, men, women, and dishes. My soul craves for sincerity, George Bowden, and my stomach hungers for the food of a man—grilled chops, boiled potatoes, and draft beer."

"Yes, sir," was the impassive reply.

George Bowden described himself as serving two masters—the Hon. Col Drindon, a gent, and a poet chap called Joyday Flowers. This wasn't neither of them, but one more or less didn't matter.

"And look here." Col stopped him as he was about to leave the room. "I'll take a cold bath."

"I'll prepare it, sir."

Again Col stopped him. "No, you won't, confound you! I'm equal to turning on a tap for myself, I suppose!"

"Very good, sir."

The words dropped as from a machine. George Bowden would have said, "Yes, sir," or "Very good, sir," impassively, whatever was toward. He was a scrupulous man, prepared to do anything that might be legally required of him in the way of service, and these were the formulae which expressed his readiness. But there was "more to him," as he would have said himself, than mere manservant, and this he let go with a shrug and a twinkle as soon as he left the room.

"This looks like the limit," he observed to François the *chef*, in the kitchen. "But he's not a bad sort of a lad for a young haw-haw, isn't Col."

"Vat iss eet?" François asked, with mincing particularity as to voice and great vivacity of manner. "Vat 'ave Monsieur? 'E iss seek?"

"It's the crisis," George Bowden averred. "He's bin sickening for something this long while past, and this is the crisis."

The Frenchman raised his eyebrows to his hair, interrogatively.

"It seems, mossoo, he don't want any more of your kickshaws," George Bowden informed him.

"Keek-shaws!" the Frenchman screamed. "I mak eem a dinnaire for zee gods—'ere, look, will you, pleas, 'ere's ze menu—and 'e call eet keek-shaws, *mon Dieu!*"

"I know the menoo by 'art," George Bowden replied, "but not knowin' what the gods dine on, I'm none the wiser. And, at any rate, Col don't want food for the gods, old white-cap. 'E

wants food for a man. 'E said so 'imself, or I wouldn't 'ave believed it."

"And, if you please, vat iss food for a man *selon lui?*" François asked, with restrained sarcasm.

"Mutton chops grilled, boiled potatoes, and draft beer."

The Frenchman made the national gesture to relieve his feelings, and asked, confidentially: "Vat 'ave 'e got, *hein?*"

"Determination of prose to the 'ead," said George Bowden. "I tell you, it's the Crisis. Telephone the butcher for chops. I don't mind if I 'ave one myself later on."

The critics of the kitchen have this advantage over the critics of the pen, that they generally know what they are talking about. A critic of the pen can easily escape accurate knowledge of his subject by paying no attention to it; a critic of the kitchen is bound to pay attention; he has his subject always under observation, and insensibly acquires the details. George Bowden did not say that this was *a* crisis, but *the* crisis. Between his master's antic-humours he had caught glimpses of the man from which he augured a limit sooner or latter to antic-humours, and here was the limit. Meteorologically stated, the crisis stood for a depression at the moment, and indicated that a lasting change of weather might be predicted as imminent.

Nothing apparently had happened to precipitate a crisis of any kind. Col Drindon had never spent a less eventful day. He was a rich man, in robust health; a popular and successful man in his own sphere; and he had nothing to worry him, no debts, no difficulties of any kind. His intimacy with Lady Ballard and Sarb had fizzled out—gone by default. There was no open rupture, no parting. No "words" on the subject, nothing but a gentle lapse, as of a tide that goes out, but does not come in again.

Col had finished the afternoon at the Corner House, which he haunted on the off days and at the hour which other people were least likely to choose for a visit. He found Ella alone, standing in one of the windows examining a piece of old lace by the waning light; but while they were still exchanging greetings Mr. Julius Harkles came in, accompanied by Jasper Brastaby, just returned from America, a man whom Ella had not hitherto seen, but of whom she had heard as a nephew of Lady Janet's. He was a slender, agile-looking, pale-faced, black-haired man, with a moustache that concealed his mouth, deep

sunk, glittering steely blue eyes, and an aquiline nose rather too big for beauty, but he passed for a handsome man. His appearance interested Ella. She set him down as attractive, the kind of man a woman likes, because he animates her, and distrusts, because, somehow, he puts her on her guard.

To be amateur of lace was the fashion, and the piece Ella had been examining served as a topic of conversation. They spread it out amongst them, each holding an end.

Ella had just bought it from an impecunious great lady, who had inherited it from a foreign ancestress. It was a rare and beautiful specimen of *point à l'aiguille*,—Early Venetian, Ella pronounced it; the designs a curious medley of figures, bearing, apparently, little or no relation to each other.

"It looks a jumble of patterns to me," said Mr. Harkles. "What do you make of it?"

"A life in cipher," Ella answered,—"a woman's life, an autobiography, I should say. Here is the infant in the cradle. Here is the child playing ball, here the young girl with a book, learning; with a pen, writing; with a piece of work in her hand, sewing. Here she is loitering with other girls; here riding through a wood with a hawk on her wrist, a gallant in the background; here the gallant has come forward and is leading her by the hand; here they are dancing with other gallant gentlemen and ladies; here they are seated at a banquet; and this undoubtedly is a marriage, two kneeling figures, a priest, a *demoiselle d'honneur*, and a vague company behind. Then this castle, her new home, and these keys, with a lute, a spinning wheel, a book, and this—a garment in the making probably—her daily occupations. Here she is standing on a turret, and below a knight in armour with his back to her, evidently riding forth to the wars; and his head turned for a last farewell. Then there is this tangle of fighting men, a battle; then a solitary knight prostrate on his back, with a sword piercing his breast, and above two winged figures carrying him, still in armour, upwards—angels bearing his soul to heaven. And here a woman lying at the foot of a cross—his widow, broken-hearted. Then the Castle keep with a funeral procession issuing from the gates—her death and burial."

"Then it can't be an autobiography," said Mr. Harkles.

"It is this last design that makes me think it an autobiography," Ella replied, "for, see"—she offered him a magnifying glass—"it is worked by a different hand—long after,

I should say, for the design is better, and new stitches are introduced."

The glass was handed round, but Jasper Brastaby's examination of the stitches was obviously perfunctory. He had had an eye on Ella all the time, and not a respectful eye.

"Polly Duval had a piece of lace," he was beginning—

But instantly the corner he held was jerked from his hand, and Col Drindon interrupted with, "Let me fold it up for you, Miss Ella."

Mr. Harkles followed on with a loud and significant, "Ahem! It looks like a change of weather. Rain would do good."

"There's a storm threatening. I hope it will blow over," Col exclaimed.

"A change in the atmosphere. I feel it electric," Brastaby drily observed, looking from one to the other, and slightly shrugging his shoulders. He had caught the danger signal, and dropped Polly Duval and her piece of lace, but what the danger was he failed to see.

The little by-play had apparently escaped Ella's observation. She had turned to look out of the window, but now stepped back with a change of countenance, as if she had seen something unpleasant. Taking the lace from Col absently, she turned towards the door. Col's eyes followed hers in time to see Ballard and Sarb enter with Captain Algernon Appleton Pointz, a man who had not recently been seen in London on account of a little gambling difficulty he had got himself into in his regiment which had made it necessary for him to send in his papers in order to escape being cashiered. The facts had been hushed up, but enough had leaked out to cast suspicion on his honour, and the more scrupulous of his set were shy of his acquaintance. He was of the big, blond, country gentleman type, large-featured, with a coarse, heavy ecru-coloured moustache.

"Harkles, my Julius!" he exclaimed jovially, as he advanced towards them. "And Jasper Brastaby! And Joyday Flowers, man of metres, poetic soul! Friends all, I greet you!"

Stopping before Ella, he bowed low.

"So you have drifted to London, Miss Ella Banks," he said. "Ella the Queen, with her court about her!"

"I do not drift, Captain Algernon Appleton Pointz," she answered. The emphasis on his name was contemptuous, and she drew herself up as she spoke.

"The wrong word? Pray excuse it!" He spoke ingratiat-

ingly. "Pointz is the loser by your choice of London for a residence. Choice, doubtless, is the right word."

Here unquestionably was a situation. Ella's head was high, and the colour flickered in her cheeks. Pointz looked expectant, but for a moment she did not respond. Then, unexpectedly, she laughed.

"And your father's tenants?" she asked. "You have made acquaintance with them all? You have studied agriculture and the condition of the people, given time and thought to the question of a living wage, and fitted yourself generally for the high calling of a landowner, doubtless,—with the help of my brother Luke—since the one and only occasion on which I had the pleasure of meeting you, before to-day."

Captain Pointz flushed brick-red.

"Where are you hit, dear?" Col Drindon drawled.

"Hit? I'm not hit anywhere," Captain Pointz retorted.

"So relieved!" sighed Col. "I thought I saw the blood flow."

Ella left them, Captain Pointz scowling, the others laughing. The Princess Taxidos and her *alter ego,* Lady Cruxhaven, had just entered the room, and Ella went forward to receive them.

"Such a nice quiet time to look at lace," said Lady Cruxhaven in her softest voice. "Nobody here!—Isn't that something too-too you have in your hand? May we see it?"

Both ladies seemed serenely unaware of the gentlemen on the other side of the room. They gloated over the antique *point à l'aiguille,* exclaimed at the funny figures, could not see the connection, then saw it quite clearly. Both wanted the lace, but were so delicately considerate neither would take it from the other, so they left it on Ella's hands.

"I'd like to see——" the harsh-voiced princess was beginning.

"Oh, don't let us see anything else to-day," Lady Cruxhaven implored. "I'm quite exhausted, it is such a horrid day. I yearn for tea in a nice comfie quiet room without the bother of going any further for it. I shall die if I don't get some directly."

"Please don't die," Ella responded laughingly to this gentle hint. "You can have tea in ten minutes in the library, if you like."

"Isn't she a dear!" the Princess exclaimed.

Ella led them to the library. On the way they met Callowabbey just entering.

"The dear thing is going to give us tea," Lady Cruxhaven cooed. "Aren't you dying for tea, Jackie?"

"I should like some," Callowabbey answered prosaically, "if I might impose——" He was evidently ill at ease, and Ella took pity on him.

"Of course," she said.

"Ella Banks is hospitality itself!" the Princess exclaimed.

Ella, returning by way of her sitting-room, found Col Drindon alone in the showroom, flipping his leg with his stick.

"What did those women want?" he said irritably.

"They asked to see lace, but they wanted tea," she answered.

"And you're letting them have it! Up to a certain point, you are shrewd, Ella Banks, beyond that point you are just daft."

"You are as cross and uncivil as a tired-out child," Ella retorted. "What have you done with the rest of your party?"

"No party of mine——" he was beginning, then stopped. These men were his boon companions; he could not honestly say they were not of his party. "Harkles and Pointz went off together. Burly Bill——" he broke off. "Where are they having tea?"

"In the library. But really, Mr. Colin Drindon!" Ella bridled. "They are my guests——"

"And you don't recognise my right to question you! Oh, very well! I thought we were friends."

"So we are, I hope," Ella answered gently. "What has upset you?"

"I wouldn't interfere," he replied, mollified, "if I thought you knew what you were doing, but I can't keep still and see your innocence abused."

"Abused! And how, please?"

"Those women, and Callowabbey, and Ballard and Sarb——"

"What has Lord Ballard and Sarb to do with it?"

"They've extended your hospitality to him."

"How do you know?"

"I'm dam—— dead sure of it."

"Well, and if they have, what harm? I see no harm in two ladies and two gentlemen having tea together in my house!"

"They are making a convenience of your house."

"Let them. I don't mind my house being made a convenience of to that extent."

"That's where your innocence comes in. You don't understand the extent——"

"Oh, if you please, change the subject!" Ella exclaimed crossly, and silenced him. She would resent it if he suggested that the meeting was not accidental. He could not prove it, so there was no more to be said to Ella; but he thought of Mr. Bosc. He supposed that Mr. Bosc had influence, and determined to speak to him.

"Won't you be late for your next engagement?" she asked.

Col ensconced himself on a settee, held on to the arm, and looked up at her comically.

"You can't dislodge me!" he said.

Ella's spirits suddenly dropped. Lately this had happened to her more than once. She found a stray chair near by and sat down.

"I shall not try," she said, in rather a weary tone.

"You are tired!" he exclaimed, jumping up.

"Not physically," she answered.

"I'm afraid I've worried you," he said, with concern.

"No, you never worry me."

"They must take a lot out of you, these people."

"Some of them. Some of them stimulate me. The tiring kind are those who always look dreadfully fatigued themselves with the effort of standing on their dignity."

Col sat down again, his good-humour restored.

"What do you think of Burnished Brass?" he asked, with interest—"Brastaby, you know."

"Why Burnished Brass?"

"From the high polish of manner with which he veils his impudent assurance."

"A purring manner," he said thoughtfully. "*Genus felidae*, I should think; a sleek creature with sheathed claws, like a well-fed leopard after a good meal."

"Oh, Lord! If only he could hear that!" Col chuckled.

"I can imagine him crouching to spring," Ella added.

"A melodramatic villain, eh?"

"Nothing so extreme," she answered. "Melodrama is out of date, I am told."

"Some things are never out of date," Col remarked, cogitating; "treason, stratagem, and spoils, for instance. You dislike cats?"

"No, I like cats—the domestic variety."

He wriggled on his seat, ruffling his hair with both hands. "Burnished Brass is certainly not of the domestic variety," he

rejoined; "but you are bound to like him. He's a lady's man."

"I am not a lady," she said.

He smiled at her quizzically. "I suppose not," he rejoined. "It would unship the Winged Victory to label her 'Lady.'"

"You label each other pretty freely," she observed. "Who is responsible?"

"For nicknames? Oh, one and another. They adapt themselves somehow out of the impalpable ether. Generally they fit the person's opposite. Burly Bill, for instance, is a small, dapper man."

"But the Sliver?"

"Oh, well, sometimes we're literal. He's the sort of person you can slip in anywhere, hence the Sliver. I forget the chap's real name, and I doubt if half a dozen of us know it. He slipped in among us somehow, and would answer to anything rather than not be recognised. He is not of us, but he has his uses, so there he is, a parasite. Our world is like the other: it takes all sorts to keep it going."

"And Mr. Jaspar Brastaby? He is of your world, I suppose?"

"By birth, yes, a younger son, fallen upon evil days. There is no gigantic system of outdoor relief in the way of sinecures for younger sons now. He's had to work, poor devil!"

"Why 'poor devil'?"

"I don't know. Yes, I do, though. He deals in money—stockbrokes."

"What is stockbroking?"

"Oh, a beastly concern! Buying cheap and selling dear, and that sort of thing; stocks and shares, you know, kind of gambling. Your gain the other chap's loss. The kind of thing a gentleman doesn't do for himself; he employs a cat's-paw, and doesn't care to know the cat by sight. By the way," he broke off, "you had met Algy Pointz before?"

"Once, as I said." She broke into an irresistible, girlish laugh.

"Thereby hangs a tale!" he exclaimed.

"You must get Captain Pointz to tell you the tale," she replied. "Lena Kedlock calls him the Blond Beast. You know Lena Kedlock?" He nodded. "Our one chance encounter was on the highroad. He claimed the right to speak to me, because my father rents a farm from his father."[1]

Her heart went back to Red Rose Farm as she spoke, and she

[1] See *Adnam's Orchard*.

ended with a sigh. Col wanted to know why she sighed. She glanced up at the strip of sombre sky above the houses.

"For earth and sky and sea," she said. "I feel cramped here among your houses, and smothered for want of air."

"Then you long for fresh air?"

"Oh, not only for fresh air," she answered. "I long—at times—for my own folk—for my half-brother Robert. He is a man, if you like. Simple, straight, strong, reliable, and so wise! You can trust him utterly. And Adnam Pratt. You should see Adnam's Orchard. He is by way of working, of making money, but like a gentleman, not at other men's expense."

"Then you don't trust any of us," he said, hoping that she would contradict him.

She was silent.

"Can you not trust me?" he pleaded.

"I told you once before," she answered lightly, "that you are not to be taken seriously. One must be able to take a man seriously in order to trust him."

He rose and walked about for a little, with his hands in his pockets, jingling the contents.

"You only see me idling here," he said at last, stopping in front of her. "I wish you could see me in my own surroundings. Come to tea with me one day at my flat, do! I'll get some one—an old cousin of mine, an awfully dear woman, you'd like her—to chaperon us. Say you will come! I should like you to see my rooms."

"I wonder what your rooms are like," she said, looking at him meditatively.

"What do you think?" he asked eagerly. "A man's rooms, you know."

"I don't know," she answered. "A man's rooms? Let me see." She considered, her eyes on him, her head on one side. "A man's rooms?" she repeated. "Spacious, airy; polished floors; no curtains, no cushions, frills, or fripperies. Books, of course, and pictures—a few—no crowding. Fresh, clean, plain—that is my idea of a man's rooms. They tell me," she added thoughtfully, "that there is a kind of man in London who is lodged like a *prima donna*."

She rose as she spoke. "I must go now," she said. "Good-bye. Your invitation was kindly meant, I am sure, but I cannot accept it. I go nowhere, except on business—to value old lace and buy it, that sort of thing; and only then when it is

quite impossible for the owner to bring it to me, which does not often happen. You must please excuse me. Good-bye!"

She crossed the room with easy, buoyant, unhurried step, he watching her, the Winged Victory of his adoration.

It was after this interview that, on entering his flat, he discovered that it was crowded and stuffy, that he must have bracing cold water for his bath, and plain food as manliest for a man.

2

George Bowden was right. For some time now the "Hon Col" had been sickening for something. Lady Ballard and Sarb and Ella Banks between them had set up the sickness, a complicated sickness, with irritability for its central symptom. A crisis had long been impending, and this crisis Ella had unconsciously precipitated.

Col had seen Mr. Bosc on the way home, and had also fallen in with Paul McAllen Ray. Paul's joy in life was an attraction to Col. The wonder and the mystery of it had made him think. Paul's influence had begotten on one side of Col's nature an indefinite yearning to drink from the same source, which yearning was ridiculed by Col's other side, and between the two he was tormented. His senses hotly urged that passing pleasures of the flesh are certain, but joys of the spirit are intangible, and only to be wrested from the Giver by the sacrifice of all that makes life worth having; but on the other side was Paul for example, a living instance to the contrary. The throes of the eternal fight of soul for its life against body were racking him, and his deep dissatisfaction was evidence of the struggle.

Cold water and plain food had a bracing effect, but the shock did not make for soothing; on the contrary, it had opened his eyes. It had made him aware of himself as a rather stout young man, and flabby, morally and physically. It had shown him that everything was all wrong in the big, luxurious room to which he retired after dinner; the part of his surroundings which he had expected to make a favourable impression upon Ella, as an expression of himself. He felt now that there were too many cushions in it, too many curtains; it was too softly carpeted, too crowded with fripperies and nicknacks of all kinds. He was lodged like a *prima donna,* he acknowledged it. The general effect suggested a feminine absence of backbone. It was as if

the body of the frequenter were incapable of self-support. Every seat was a prop; there was no accommodation for any one who could sit upright. The deep, springy, softly padded easy-chairs were made to recline in; the broad divan piled high with big down cushions covered with soft satin, to loll upon. And the exquisitely sensuous colouring, womanish again—a bed of flowers! "My soul sups on colour," he had been wont to drawl, "and if you want colour you must go to the flowers. Would you savour the sweetness of purple and black? Look into an anemone!"

He remembered the saying now: he had repeated it often enough. But he had not gone to the anemones for his keynote. Their colours and contrasts are strong and manly, and womanishness favours tenderer gradations, moonlight rather than sunlight, as the more becoming. He remembered, too, a newspaper paragraph which had described his abode as "a costly flat overlooking Hyde Park, and made sumptuous by the exotic taste of the young and wealthy aristocrat; whose poems, of a tropical *chaleur*, have roused the widest interest in the personality of one who chooses to be known only by the suggestive pseudonym of 'Joyday Flowers.'" He read fame into that paragraph at the time; now he writhed at the recollection of it.

He had furnished his flat in the first flush of youth and liberty and London life, under the influence of a bad master. He was not physically decadent, nor mentally. Thrown haphazard, a mere boy, into the company of men whose age and standing commanded the respect of his diffident youth, he had involuntarily taken on the colour of his surroundings, like an imitative insect. He found himself among degenerates, and conformed without thought to their usages. Had chance thrown him among men of muscle, he would have conformed to their standard in like manner.

The carnal man is a bad master. Col was enervated by luxury and inaction, but the condition in his case was an acquired condition, the result of a pose, and not yet incurable. Sensuous rather than sensual, he was not by nature a voluptuary, though a few more years of the life he was leading would have made him one. So far, he had escaped utter corruption by the refinement of his mind. He still sickened at coarse excesses, and there was enough good left in him to make a clean man of him yet. The strength of character which had made him a dicta-

tor in the wrong set, only required direction to raise him out of the mire into better company.

That evening those of Col's friends who had nothing better to do dropped in to see Col after dinner,—Callowabbey, Burly Bill, Captain Pointz, Burnished Brass, the Sliver, The O'Haleron, Filmer Dabbs, junior, and Mr. Harkles among others. But Col found that his newly awakened distaste for luxury extended to the men who loved it. His greetings were offhand. He did not want them; neither did he want to be alone; everything was all wrong.

Callowabbey reclined on the divan, propped up with cushions. "I call this comfy," he said.

"You would," Col drily assented.

"That doesn't sound like a compliment," Callowabbey complained. "Wouldn't a little less air be better? The temperature isn't exactly tropical to-night."

"Isn't it?" Col answered. "I'm not thin-skinned."

"Only off-colour," said Brastaby from the depths of the easy-chair in which he was lounging.

"Why off-colour, if you please?" Col asked morosely.

His tone attracted the attention of others of the group. They thought he had been drinking. Bowden, coming in at the moment with refreshments on a tray, caused a diversion.

"Bring me a calumut, Bowden," said Callowabbey.

Bowden, expressionless as an automaton, placed a small inlaid table beside him, and handed him the tray to help himself.

Having taken a long drink and lighted a cigar, Callowabbey sank back on the cushions. "As I remarked before," he said, "this is comfy. If only you would order in an Odalisque to fan me, Col, heart of Sybarite could ask no more."

"I thought you were complaining of the temperature just now," the Sliver piped in strident falsetto.

"I'm complaining of the temperature still," Callowabbey rejoined. "First I was cold, now I'm too hot. Oh, for an Odalisque!"

"Talking of Odalisques," said Brastaby, with his eye on a ring of smoke. "That's a devilish handsome girl at the lace shop. An importation since my time. But why the devil did you all look flabbergasted when I began about Polly Duval's lace?"

"We know the story," said Mr. Harkles.

"Does she?" Brastaby asked.

"Good Lord, no! There isn't a man who knows her would dare to tell her it. Philanthropy moved us to stop you, dear friend. We saved you something."

"Why this particularity?" Brastaby wanted to know.

"You'll soon see, if you're ever let into the Corner House again," the Sliver sniggered.

"Who is she?" Brastaby asked.

"She is a mystery," Mr. Harkles answered solemnly.

"Not at all," Pointz broke in, speaking the truth for joy of the contradiction. "I know all about her."

"You do," said Ballard and Sarb. "I saw that in her face when you spoke to her. Tell us the story."

The Blond Beast knew what they expected, but he also knew the value of the unexpected, and continued to work the vein of truth. "There's no mystery about the girl at all," he said. "She's the daughter of a tenant farmer at Pointz, my father's place, and never left there till she came to live here under the patronage of the Duchess of Castlefield Saye——"

"So it is *said*," Mr. Harkles interposed, but Algernon ignored the significant emphasis.

"The girl is all right," he concluded. "She's by way of being intellectual, has views, and all that sort of rot. She put me through my facings once——"

"That day you met her on the highroad," Col said, sneering.

"That was the day," Pointz answered smilingly, "as you know all about it, I need not repeat the story."

"Intellectual women are the devil," Ballard and Sarb exclaimed. "I like a woman to be a woman myself."

This sentiment was received with the approval usual among gentlemen who still cling to the superstition that women are liable to be metamorphosed by a radical change of nature into some other kind of creature once they let go of man as the central interest of their lives.

"I had tea at the Corner House to-day," Callowabbey said, simpering.

"So had I, *en petit comité*," said Ballard and Sarb.

"What liars men are!" Col exclaimed.

"I was thinking it was a new departure for Ella Banks," The O'Haleron said slowly, looking from one to the other.

"I did not say I had tea with Ella Banks," Ballard and Sarb rejoined haughtily.

"You intended it to be inferred," Col retorted.

Callowabbey made no defence.

"I suppose you were after proposing to her again, Misther Callowabbey," The O'Haleron chaffed, "and it isn't a week since the last time she refused you. Sure I know all about it. She said, 'Come again when you're grown up, my dear boy, if y'ever are, and I'll help you to find a nice wife,' suitable to your mental attainments. Now, run away and play."

Callowabbey, with an affected air of detachment, watched the smoke from his cigar curling up to the ceiling.

"She refused the Sliver too," said Filmer Dabbs. Callowabbey, roused from his apparent detachment by that incautious "too," darted a look at his parasite that threatened reprisals, and Filmer hastily recanted. "It was the Sliver she refused, that's who you're thinking of, O'Haleron. She sent him away with a flea in his ear."

The Sliver's sallow face grew hot. He tried to assume Callowabbey's air of indifference, but only succeeded in looking sheepish.

"Sure she's always refusing somebody. She's refused the worst and she's refused the best of us," The O'Haleron sighed.

"Meaning yourself, I suppose," Mr. Harkles opined.

"Faith, me, too," said O'Haleron. "I put it to her straight. I said I'm The O'Haleron of Ballybredagh. Me wife has the title of Madam, and if you're inclined to be Madam O'Haleron at any time when ye've the money to support the ancient and honourable title, just tip me a wink."

"I don't quite see the Winged Victory tipping anyone a wink," Ballard and Sarb commented precisely.

"And what happened?" Mr. Harkles urged, his curiosity excited.

"She asked me what I'd do with me present wife," O'Haleron gravely pursued. "I said I hadn't a wife at all, at all. She said what did I mean thin by telling her me wife had the title of Madam, and I said it was The O'Haleron's wife I meant. 'But you said you were The O'Haleron,' ses she. 'True for you,' ses I. Then she looked at me out of the lovely eyes of her awhile, and at last she ses, 'It's a fine man y'are, Mr. O'Haleron, and it's taken with you I am intoirely, more's the pity, for it's afraid I'd be to marry you.' 'How so?' ses I. 'It's the good husband you'll be throwing away, if you mean ut, and one that ud worship the ground you walk on till the day of his death.' 'I believe

you,' she ses; 'that's not me trouble. I can't marry you becos I'd die of fatigue trying to understand you.'"

This story was received with ironical laughter. The O'Haleron was seldom in earnest when not in a combative mood, and most of the company chose to think that he was jesting now; but Mr. Harkles, in the interests of gossip, hoped that he was not. He was sitting next to O'Haleron, and asked him confidentially, under cover of the laughter, "How much of that are we to believe, O'Haleron?"

The *bonhomie* of the pure Celt is often only a decorative veneer, thinly covering his constitutional truculence. The slightest jar, however accidental, and the *bonhomie* disappears like the flame of a candle in a gust of wind, and he is another man,—surly, vengeful, quick to retaliate, and cruelly glad to hurt. O'Haleron turned on Mr. Harkles: "Is it accusing me of lying, y'are?" he exclaimed. "I'd have paid you the compliment of thinking you quicker to detect the real thing in lying, experienced as y'are, wid yer living to make by it. Ask Callowabbey there, and the Sliver, if I'm to be believed. Didn't we all three of us get drunk to relieve our feelings after she had refused us, and till each other how and all it was?"

The Sliver and Callowabbey exchanged rapid glances, but held their peace.

"Judgment by default," Brastaby exclaimed, and others applauded the decision with a view to curbing O'Haleron's spleen. "She seems to be a difficult lady," Brastaby pursued. "What is her price?"

"Dear Burnished Brass, I am sorry to quench your hopes," Ballard and Sarb rejoined suavely; "but I do assure you the girl is not to be bought by any kind of coin that you can command."

"I'll bet——" Brastaby was beginning.

"You damned well won't," Col shouted at him. "You—or any fellow—who mentions—her—again, or alludes to her, I'll jolly well kick out. I'm sick of your beastliness, the whole lot of you."

He had been lounging against the writing-table, but straightened himself as he spoke, and stood clenching his hands threateningly.

Brastaby gathered himself up from his lounging posture, with an ugly gleam in his steely blue eyes. A cat, set on the alert for a moment by the bark of a dog, flashes just such a glance.

The look and gesture suggested Ella's laconic rating, *Genus Felidae,* to Col. The recollection changed the current of his thoughts, and sent him pacing up and down the room. Behind his back, Mr. Harkles held up a decanter significantly, Brastaby understood, and checked the retort on his lips. But Col had seen Mr. Harkles's signal reflected in a mirror, and understood too. He returned to the group, resentfully determined to show that he was sober.

"Where are the matches?" somebody asked.

"Callowabbey is wallowing on them, I believe," Col said sourly.

"Wallowing, my dear chap!" Callowabbey remonstrated. "Wallowing suggests filth."

"It does," said Col. He stood a little, grimly frowning, thinking it out. "Wallowing," he said at last, looking at Callowabbey, "wallowing amounts to that, whether it is done in mud or on satin cushions."

The big laugh of the dapper little Marquis of Ballard and Sarb, who was sitting across an easy-chair, his legs dangling over one arm, his back resting against the other, rolled out derisively. "You'd better go all round while you're at it, Joyday, dear," he advised. "Your poetic mind is surcharged. You'll feel better when you have relieved it. It is my turn now."

Col looked at him moodily, then his glance travelled from one to another. It rested on the suave Algernon, on the feline Brastaby, on the irascible O'Haleron, on the insinuating Sliver, on the bland Harkles, on the parasitic Filmer, and on the dissipated "Young Earl" Callowabbey, now sitting on the edge of the divan, looking disconsolate as a man just out of bed after a rough awakening. Distaste for them all grew to a head as he inspected them. He silently summed them up with "What a crew!" The expression of his countenance betrayed his conclusion as uncomplimentary.

"Hope you'll know us all again," the Sliver piped. Col glanced at him contemptuously, and once more resumed his restless pacing.

When his back was turned his guests signalled inquiries to each other, and especially to Mr. Harkles, as to what was to be done. Mr. Harkles gave them a lead in the interests of peace by starting an indifferent topic. This they discussed with a show of ease which they were far from feeling. Was Col drunk? Was he mad? Or did he deliberately intend to insult them all?

Clearly he was not himself, and something must be done—but what? As they could not consult in his presence, they waited on each other to make a move, but nobody stirred.

George Bowden, at last, coming into the room, ended their dilemma. He came to set out a card-table, an accustomed duty. When he had gone the Sliver exclaimed: "A good idea! Who's for a game?"

Before anyone could reply Col made for the table. The window Callowabbey had complained of was still wide open. Col seized the table, pushed it forward, and tipped it over the sill. His guests sat staring at him petrified, too astonished to speak or move, their breath held in suspense, listening for the crash below.

Brastaby recovered himself first. "You might have killed someone!" he exclaimed. Callowabbey wiped his forehead.

There was a strip of garden railed in between the flats and the road below.

"A cat, perhaps," Col answered casually.

Packs of cards had fallen from the table as he moved it, and lay scattered on the floor. These he deliberately gathered up and hurled out into the night. Then he stood facing his guests, who were all on their feet by this time, collected in a group as if for a photograph, the diminutive marquis in front, Mr. Harkles well in the background, a safe place.

It was Ballard and Sarb who had the courage to demand an explanation.

"Is this a joke, may I ask?" he said, "or have you taken leave of your senses?"

"Neither," Col answered. "It's just a sign that I've made up my mind. I am sick of the life I've been leading, and I am going to clear out every cursed thing that was a part of it, and begin afresh."

"Are your friends included in the clearance you intend to affect?" Ballard and Sarb asked haughtily.

"Every blasted one of them who isn't for turning over a new leaf too."

Ballard and Sarb turned on his heel and was for leaving the room.

"Stop!" Col exclaimed, bethinking himself. He passed his hand wearily over his head. "I've been beastly rude. Damn bad form, in one's own quarters, too. I'm sorry. I apologise. The truth is, I'm not the thing to-night. I'm aching—I've got

something——" he had been going to tell them that he had something on his mind that he wanted to say to them, but he caught an apprehensive look in Mr. Harkles's eye, and the demon of mischief prompted him to say instead—"It may be infectious."

Mr. Harkles was outside the door in a twinkling.

"My dear fellow, I hope not!" he exclaimed, from a safe distance. "I'll—I'll come to-morrow, and—and inquire. But I hope it's nothing. Good-night!"

They listened to his retreating footsteps. "I thought as much," said Col, smiling grimly.

"Are ye really bad, Colin?" The O'Haleron asked. "I mean is it sick ye are? Because in that case, an' ye'd let me, it's staying to nurse ye I'd be—even if 'twas the smallpox itself."

"O'Haleron, I'm touched to the heart! What a good chap you are! But it's soul-sickness I've got. And I mean it—I mean to make a clearance——"

"Every blasted one of us, eh?" said Ballard and Sarb.

"I've told you," said Col. "I'm for turning over a new leaf."

"Well, I'm not," said Ballard and Sarb, leaving the room as he spoke.

The rest followed, with the exception of O'Haleron, who hesitated, his eyes on Col inquiringly.

"Are you for staying?" Col asked.

"I am and I ain't," was the undecided reply.

"Stay!" Col begged.

"Will ye come into the Church?" O'Haleron asked.

"The Roman Catholic Church? No!"

"Then there's no hope for ye," O'Haleron said sadly.

"*'Other sheep I have which are not of this fold,'*" Col reminded him.

"Maybe," O'Haleron answered cautiously. "But—but think it over."

Col shook his head.

Lingeringly The O'Haleron turned to go. At the door he stopped.

"I'm not despairin' of ye," he said. "Think it over."

Down in the street he found the rest of the party enlightening Mr. Harkles.

"Good Lord!" Callowabbey was saying. "I never had such a time in my life! What does it mean? What's he got? Harkles, you're for putting two-and-two together, what's up?

He says it's soul-sickness he's got; what do you make of that?"

Mr. Harkles, unable to make anything of it, shook his head mysteriously: "We shall see," he said.

3

The gentlemen had had to let themselves out, for it was after hours with George Bowden, who was a stickler for his rights, and didn't feel no call to budge for anybody when off duty. He was not grudging of extra service, however, when there was something he cared to budge for, and on this occasion the excitement of the Crisis had kept him up. While setting the card-table he had felt that the atmosphere was charged with coming events. He had perceived that his employer was out with his pals, and that his pals were quandaryish; and, through the pantry-door ajar, watching their ignominious exit, it had appeared to him that it would be worth his while to clear up, for once, before going to bed.

Col, when he found himself alone, had a moment of inexpressible relief. He clenched his fists and stretched his arms like a prisoner just freed from his fetters.

Next he looked round. A big down-cushion lay near him on the floor. He picked it up and threw it out of the window. Others, crushed in the chairs and scattered on the divan, produced an effect of disorder which was an offence to his newborn fastidiousness. He collected them all, and flung them out. Decanters, Siphons, used glasses, and trays of cigar and cigarette ends and ashes littered the tables. He surveyed the mess with disgust, and was about to dispose of it as he had disposed of the cushions, when George Bowden entered, tray in hand.

"I thought I'd clear away, sir," Bowden said. The clearance already affected did not escape his notice, neither did the explanation offered by a piece of drapery dangling across the windowsill.

"By all means," said Col. "Clear away everything. Send for a van to-morrow. Tear up the carpets, pull down the curtains, have all this rubbish carted away, every blessed thing." Remembering the insinuation of the bottle, he checked himself, and ordered his voice soberly, to show that he knew what he was doing. "Except a few necessaries," he added. "I'll label

anything we can't do without. But everything else must go. A clean sweep, do you hear? Must go."

"Very good, sir. Beg pardon, sir. Where are the things to be sent?"

"Oh—to the devil."

"Yes, sir," came the automatic reply.

Col rubbed his head with both hands, his eyes on the man's expressionless face. "George Bowden," he burst out, "outwardly you are the manservant of everyday life, the manservant of fact, the venerable *cliché* of fiction, the excellent conventional manservant we meet at every turn; but, inwardly, George Bowden, what are you? Raise the veil for a moment, and let me see you, face to face. Have you any of the feelings of a man?"

"Yes, sir, every one."

"When do you show them, then?"

"When I'm playing the man, sir."

"What are you playing now?"

"On duty, sir? On duty I am a machine, sir."

Col looked at him with interest. "It is not to my credit, Bowden," he said, "but the fact is we've lived together—how many years?"

"Seven, sir."

"Seven years! And never till this moment did it occur to me that you were a man like myself."

George Bowden waited.

"It is inhuman," Col pursued. "Seven years in close daily intercourse, and you don't know me as a man, and I don't know you. You've just been an automatic machine to me. I put pennies in the slot, and you work."

"Beg pardon, sir. I've observed that you have feelings."

"Oh!" said Col. "Then your attitude towards me has been more human than mine towards you."

George Bowden did not deny it.

"I wonder how much further you go as a human being," Col pursued meditatively. "There is a question I should like to ask, but I have a delicacy. It is an intimate question."

George Bowden stood with his hands by his sides, resting on one leg. He shifted to the other now.

"I should like to ask it as man to man," Col added.

"Ask it, sir."

"Do you ever pray to God?"

Bowden looked his employer in the face, and answered on the wonted note, unemotionally: "Yes, sir, night and morning."

"You serve mammon by day, and square it with the Almighty at night?"

"If you please, sir."

There was for the first time a shade of offence in the man's tone, which did not escape Col's quick apprehension. "I express myself crudely," he said, "but I mean no disrespect. I beg your pardon."

"Granted, sir."

They stood eyeing each other, the man waiting, Col meditative.

"What on earth do you think of me?" slipped from him at last unawares.

"I pray for you, sir."

"Scored, by Jove!" Col exclaimed, clapping his hands together.

He walked to the window, and stood there long, looking out into the night. When at last he turned the litter had disappeared, and so also had George Bowden.

Col threw himself on the broad, bare divan, face downwards, and sobbed like a child.

CHAPTER V

RESPONSIBLE POUNCE SUGGESTS——

1

Col had expressed to Mr. Bosc pretty plainly his suspicion of the convenience some of Ella's acquaintances were making of her house, and Mr. Bosc decided that it was a matter in which action should be taken. His decision was all the more prompt because Mrs. Pounce had previously let fall a disturbing hint. Ella's high-handedness, the summary way in which she had first put Mrs. Pounce in her place and afterwards kept her there, had set up a festering rancour in that respectable woman's breast. "I'll be even with her yet," swore Mrs. Pounce. It was for this purpose that she maneuvred the engagement of Pecky Tim. Beveridge found that he wanted help in the hall, and Mrs. Pounce had perceived the strategic advantage to herself of having a boy belonging to her licensed by his office to be

always about upstairs, one sharp to observe and trained to report. When, therefore, Mr. Bosc decided to add a page to Ella's establishment, he was easily persuaded to give the nephew of the efficient housekeeper a trial, and Ella's liking for the boy had secured him the place permanently. Mrs. Pounce was wont to say that Pecky had good blood in him, and she ought to have known, for she had lived in the best families. "Mrs." in her case was brevet rank, but there was nothing old-maidish about Mrs. Pounce.

No better tool for Mrs. Pounce's purpose than Pecky could have been found, provided he was loyal to her. On this head Mrs. Pounce had no doubt. Conspirators are apt to overlook some one important possibility in their calculations, with fatal results. Mrs. Pounce had been triumphant when she found that Ella had taken to Pecky, but it never occurred to her that Pecky might be won to Ella. This, however, was the case. Pecky's attachment to Mrs. Pounce was cupboard love, but it was in his nature to care for all the good things of this world, and, whereas Mrs. Pounce only ministered to his stomach, Ella appealed to the more refined of his nascent senses, as Beauty incarnate. To be about her, to hear her speak, to be spoken to by her, to win a smile of approval,—these were the delights of his life, and by these she had bound him to her. All of him that was not carnal appetite she satisfied, and in the light of her countenance he glowed and was glad with a more exquisite gladness than ever resulted from the fullest meal. Still, there was that huge, carnal appetite of his, which, in the growing boy, not only demands good eating for its satisfaction, but demands it with an urgency there is no resisting. Mrs. Pounce did not disguise her hostile intent towards Ella from Pecky Tim, a mistake which set him on guard. Unfortunately for his loyalty, Mrs. Pounce paid for successful spying in good things to eat,—a full report meant a rich reward; and hungry Timothy, thinking himself equal to serving two masters, carnal appetite and spiritual affection, though they pulled in opposite directions, essayed a compromise. He supposed himself capable of deciding on what to report, so that there would be no 'arm in it, and the result was that he betrayed his lidy unwittingly. He saw no 'arm in mentioning that he'd seen an ole gent come out of the sitting-room late one night, or that it was the same ole gent who was 'aving tea with his lidy one afternoon; but tea for two in the sitting-room being an unprecedented occurrence

(except in the case of Mr. Bosc) Pounce, watching to see the old gent depart, recognised the Duke. Then, after Ella's first party, Timothy, peeping through the keyhole, had again discovered the ole gent in the sitting-room, and on repairing to the housekeeper's room, with appetising spoils from the feast upstairs in full view, but withheld until he should have earned his reward, had been tempted to mention the circumstance. "Good boy!" said Mrs. Pounce, giving him a heaped-up plate of dainties. When he was well under weigh with them, she asked in a casual tone: "What was they doing?" "Kissing," Timothy answered absently, there being no room for anything in his mind at the moment but cakes. Then Pounce was satisfied that she knew enough to do for her fine ladyship. Rightly judging Mr. Bosc incapable of conniving at anything scandalous, she conceived that she had only to await a favourable opportunity to accomplish her nefarious purpose. And Mr. Bosc, with his mind already prepared to harbour a suggestion, gave her the chance to launch one, which afterwards fructified poisonously, though its immediate consequence was not what Mrs. Pounce had anticipated. Mr. Bosc had silenced her first hint of goings-on of which she disapproved, but after Col Drindon had spoken it occurred to him that it might be well to hear what she had to say. Accordingly, he gave the good woman an opening to loosen her tongue. "Everything going on all right, Mrs. Pounce?" he asked conversationally.

"Ahim!" said Mrs. Pounce, raising the fingers of a mittened hand to cover her mouth genteelly. Mr. Bosc was at a disadvantage with Mrs. Pounce because of his masculine prejudices. Her modest diffidence would have had no charm for another woman, but modest diffidence, combined with usefulness, is every man's ideal of a woman when he requires her services in any capacity. Given modest diffidence with efficiency, and a man is curiously apt to take for granted everything else that it suits him to have a woman be. There was a cloud of witnesses to attest to Mrs. Pounce's efficiency. She had been known as Responsible Pounce in the best families, and she had proved to Mr. Bosc's satisfaction that she thoroughly deserved her reputation. Therefore when she said "Ahim!" Mr. Bosc pricked up his ears.

"Now, Mrs. Pounce," he said, "speak out. If everything is not going on all right, it is your duty to tell me."

"Well, sir. I 'ope I do my dooty. I always 'ev and always

shell," Mrs. Pounce replied, "though speakin' is 'ard w'en things not pleasant 'as to be said, but dooty is dooty. And Mr. Bosc, sir, there is things goin' on in this 'ouse, you may take it from me, sir, things as I've never been used to, the same not bein' on the square, sir, if I may say so. Bein' only a pore woman, sir, I wouldn't ask you to take my solitary word, but I've documentary evidence,"—she drew a paper from her pocket, and laid it on the table before him—"if you'll just be so good as to cast your eyes over that which doin' my dooty, as I always 'ev, I think it right to show you."

The document she produced was composed of fragments of writing neatly pieced together by an evidently practised hand. Mr. Bosc cast his eye over it, and discovered it to be a love-letter written by Col Drindon to Ella Banks—the same which Col had torn up and Mrs. Pounce had culled from the wastepaper-basket.

Mr. Bosc was shaken with conflicting emotions. An attack upon Ella herself was a shock for which he was unprepared. His recent interview with Col Drindon threw light on the letter, and a glance at it sufficed to show that the young man's intentions were honourable. He turned upon Mrs. Pounce. Mrs. Pounce doing her duty and Mrs. Pounce playing the spy were two different persons.

"How did you get hold of this?" he asked severely, tapping the letter.

Mrs. Pounce trembled. "I thought it my dooty, sir," she faltered. "Sech goings on with gentlemen as I 'even't bin' used to——"

Mr. Bosc tapped the letter again vehemently. "You've been spying on your lady," he exclaimed. Mrs. Pounce sniffed at "lady." "Pack up your things and leave the house at once——"

"Mr. Bosc, sir——"

"You're a malevolent woman, a hypocritical, malevolent woman. You would have me believe this innocent young lady——" Mr. Bosc's indignation deprived him of words, but not of presence of mind. He knocked Mrs. Pounce's hand aside, and saved the letter from falling into her clutches.

Mrs. Pounce saw herself turned out, so in for a penny in for a pound. She set her arms akimbo, and tossed her head. Thus, without modest diffidence, she dawned upon Mr. Bosc as a younger and better-looking woman than she had hitherto found it convenient to appear, but a very different woman from Responsible Pounce.

"Begging your pardon, Mr. Bosc," she broke out impudently, "but innercent young lidies don't 'ev old gentlemen comin' to the 'ouse at all hours——"

Mr. Bosc pushed back his chair with a clatter and stood up; his face was twitching painfully. "How dare you," he was beginning—

"Oh, I dare right enough," she interrupted. "And you'll be wishin' you'd encouraged me to dare, that's what you'll be wishin' by and by, Mr. Bosc, w'en she's done wi' yew an' it's too late. She's turned all the men's 'eds, that young woman 'as —lidy, indeed!—the young men's and likewise the ole one's, same as yours, which it would surprise you if you could see yourself, to think any woman would take the trouble, which it's not for your beauty, Mr. Bosc. But you'll see, an' I'll be there to see too, w'en you all come into Court to settle up yer innercent young lady's affairs. O Lord!—There's the p'lice court, Mr. Bosc, an' there's the 'Igh Court o' Justice, Mr. Bosc, and amany other courts, Mr. Bosc—likewise there's the Divorce Court, Mr. Bosc! Good-day, sir!"

She left Mr. Bosc quivering with rage. To have been taken in by such a hussy! He tried to compose himself, but just as his anger cooled fragments of her tirade recurred and exasperated him afresh. He had intended to see Ella before he left the house, but changed his mind. In his present state he might say more than was wise.

2

The next opportunity Mr. Bosc found for a quiet talk with Ella was one evening on his way home from a dinner-party. He arrived rather late, but by appointment, and found her expecting him. He noticed with pleasure that she was most becomingly dressed. He was not a vain man, but as there was no one else to dress for, it was natural to suppose that she had dressed for him. Business arising out of the dismissal of Mrs. Pounce was the ostensible object of his visit, but what he intended to make her understand was that it was possible to know all about lace without knowing anything worth mentioning about life. The alliterative phrase pleased him, it was neat. "Human nature" would have been better for the sense than "life," and "modern Society" best of all, but neither would have been neat, and the long enforced use of uncouth legal

phraseology had given Mr. Bosc a taste for neatness of expression.

He found Ella engaged in a pursuit for which she had a quite masculine aptitude. She was contentedly doing nothing. An active-minded woman, once she is keyed up to work, is apt to be always at it—at something. She makes truce with her head by employing her hands. After a hard day of mental exertion she racks her nerves with her needle all the evening, and when she goes to bed only feels worthy if she has exhausted the remnant of her recuperative power. A man in her place would not squander himself so extravagantly, and in this Ella had a man's endowment of common sense. When the time came to rest, she was happy doing nothing.

"So Responsible Pounce has gone," was her cheerful greeting. "I always wondered how you could stand her."

"Then you disliked the woman!" Mr. Bosc exclaimed. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Ella slightly shrugged her shoulders. "I didn't feel it necessary to like my housekeeper," she said. "She was part of my machinery, and all I ask of my machinery is that it shall work without a hitch. I discovered no flaw in the working, and you were satisfied. Also, I did not feel it fair to oust the woman simply because I disliked her, and furthermore, if I had, you would have scored one against women generally—the trouble they give, you know, with their unreasoning likes and dislikes. But look here, Mr. Bosc, dear friend, I am glad to be rid of Responsible Pounce, but you must not deprive me of Timothy. Timothy is my only young human interest in life."

Mr. Bosc blinked hard. "I had thought it would be better to break off all connection," he said.

"No, no," she interrupted energetically. "Spare Timothy. Besides, he has no respect and very little liking for Mrs. Pounce. He will break off the connection himself, if you leave him to me."

"So be it then," said Mr. Bosc, and crossed one long leg over the other by way of full stop to that subject. The difficulty was how to attack the more important one. Ella gave him an opening.

"Why did you send Mrs. Pounce away?" she asked.

"She—er—presumed to criticise some of what she called the 'goings on' here."

"Which, for example?" Ella asked laughingly.

Mr. Bosc fell back on Col Drindon's report. "The people who frequent these fashionable establishments are not always estimable," he said.

"Very likely not," she answered, "but that is not my affair. It is their social influence and their money that matter to me. My object is to make them pay. I see them as people who live in luxurious idleness at the expense of toiling multitudes, to whom they in their greed barely concede enough to keep body and soul together."

"But in the pursuit of your object you may run risks of loss——"

"The outlay must be considerable," she said. "I know. My teas and things. But they pay. I assure you, cent per cent."

"In money, perhaps. But there is such a thing as loss of credit. Hospitality may be abused. I should be sorry if you failed."

"Failed!" she exclaimed. "What a dreadful word! I never allow it to remain in my mind for a moment. Why should I fail?"

"Do you allow me to be candid?"

"Of course."

"For want of knowledge of the world. You are as ignorant of life as you are knowing in lace. You confess that you consider men and women from one point of view only—your object. That is the mistake you make. You are in danger so long as you do not regard them also from the point of view of yourself personally. Their conduct in your house may at any moment endanger your credit, if, by being indifferent to it, you give your enemies reason to believe that you countenance what Mrs. Pounce described as 'goings on.' Your enemies will say 'birds of a feather.'"

"Really, Mr. Bosc, I do not see what you are driving at. What can people do here of which I should disapprove?"

"It is the character of the frequenters, the people whom you treat as intimates, or appear to treat as intimates, that you should be concerned about. Your enemies——"

"Enemies, again, Mr. Bosc! Have I enemies, then?"

"Every young, successful, and—er—attractive woman has enemies," he replied; "enemies of her own sex who would gladly ruin her because she is young and—er—attractive; and enemies of the other sex who masquerade as friends and admirers. I

need not particularise, but, oh! do be careful. Be always on guard. Take no man or woman for a friend until you know all that there is to be known of them. Inform yourself, inquire, listen well, and say nothing."

"You are a little alarming, are you not?" she asked, smiling.

"I want to alarm you, I want to put you on your guard," he answered earnestly, "especially against the wolves in sheep's clothing."

A sound as of the hall door being opened and shut caused Ella to look alert on the instant. Her eyes lighted up, the wild-rose tint flickered on her cheeks, she rose expectantly. Behind Mr. Bosc the sitting-room door opened, and someone entered unannounced. Ella stepped forward with outstretched hands, then stopped short, and dropped her pretty curtsey.

Mr. Bosc, who had risen, turned about, and found himself face to face with the Duke of Castlefield Saye. The hand the Duke held out absently to Mr. Bosc had a latchkey in it.

Adaptable Bosc ceremoniously withdrew.

3

Out into the clear, cold, frosty night strode Adaptable Bosc, his hat jammed down on his head, his hands thrust deep in his pockets one moment, his arms working like flails the next, Mrs. Pounce's allusion to old gentlemen coming in at all hours, and her sinister suggestion of the divorce court frothing in his mind. Automatically he made for home on foot, regardless of the distance. People he passed in the streets thought him mad or drunk; policemen he encountered turned and followed him a little way, just to make sure that he was capable of taking care of himself. Never in his whole decent life had he made such an exhibition of himself, but he was quite unconscious of it, unconscious of the attention he attracted, unconscious of everything at first but the impulse to keep moving. He was stunned, as it were, by that latchkey.

Mr. Bosc had hitherto taken it for granted that the Duke should see to Ella's affairs himself in order to save his indolent Duchess the trouble. Knowing the Duchess's parsimony, he had no doubt but that the Duke exceeded his instructions with regard to the maintenance of their *protégée*, but his own keen and disinterested interest in Ella explained the Duke's. Had their positions been reversed Mr. Bosc would have been just

as lavish. Also, the variety of the Duke's activities made it a matter of course that he should take a personal and practical interest in an enterprise which appealed both to his artistic and philanthropic proclivities. But neither in art nor philanthropy could Mr. Bosc find a satisfactory explanation of that latchkey. It had upset the whole foundation of his faith, which had rested on the assumption that there was no intimacy between the Duke and Ella—that, in fact, they seldom, if ever, met.

Late as it was when he reached home, Mr. Bosc found his mother still up. She expected to be gently chidden for losing her rest, and was ready to explain that she had been beguiled by an exciting book and had forgotten the time, but no explanation was needed, for Mr. Bosc himself was unaware of the time, and he offered her no greeting of any kind.

Women are apt to make a personal matter of everything, and to intrude their own feelings in and out of season. Not so Mrs. Bosc. She had expected a show of affection; when no show of affection was forthcoming as usual she did not retire into herself hurt, or say something unpleasant. She had learnt wisdom by thinking little about herself all her life, and considering other people. She knew that a man's long-tried and deep devotion does not change to indifference in a few hours, and did not therefore suffer the suspicion that her son's affection for her was waning. The disturbance in his face sufficiently accounted for what was unusual in his manner. Something had gone wrong, that was evident, which had put herself and everything else out of his mind for the moment. Aloysius was not himself, and the thing to be done under the circumstances was to procure him a restorative. She fetched him a stiff whisky and soda, made him drink it, and told him to sit down. He had been standing since he entered the room, looking into the fire. Mechanically he obeyed her.

As the stimulant acted, his mind began to work coherently again, and out of the jumble of his thoughts one clear phrase took shape, his own last words of warning to Ella: "I want to put you on your guard, especially against the wolves in sheep's clothing."

Here was a pointing.

His mother, seated on the other side of the hearth, busied herself with her knitting. She did not worry him with questions, not she, wise woman! That is not the way to loosen a

man's tongue. She waited for the whisky to act; and presently she had the satisfaction of seeing him punctuate his thoughts with a twitch of his nose in his natural manner, and knew that Aloysius was a lawyer again, arranging the facts of the case succinctly.

Succinctly he related the events of the evening in detail, the dinner first, and then his conversation with Ella. His mother had known that he intended to visit the Corner House on his way home. His object in giving her a full account was to see the effect on her unprepared mind of the point that was troubling him. He believed in the infallibility of her woman's intuition, and was anxious to obtain her opinion unbiassed by his own.

Proceeding with his story he concluded: "I warned Ella particularly to beware of wolves in sheep's clothing. Just as I said this the Duke walked in unannounced. He had a latchkey in his hand."

"Yes, dear," his mother said expectantly, as if she thought he had still to come to the point. There was no change of expression in her charming old face. Her bright brown eyes were only intent, the half smile stayed on her lips. She saw nothing to trouble about. Mr. Bosc felt a momentary relief.

"Yes, dear?" she repeated interrogatively.

"That is all, mother," he said.

It was her turn to feel relieved. "I was afraid there was something wrong," she said, "you looked so disturbed when you came in."

"Then you see nothing wrong?"

"In what, dear?"

"The Duke let himself in with a latchkey."

Mrs. Bosc looked puzzled. "But why not?" she asked. "Probably he has always let himself into that house with a latchkey."

"But the time of night, mother?"

"Well, weren't you there at the same time?" she answered smilingly.

"But on business, mother, and you knew I was going, and why."

"Well, and why should not the Duke go there on business, too, and mention the matter beforehand to anyone whom it might concern? Or why even should he not look in just to see Ella for the same reason that you went yourself at that hour, because it was the best time to find her disengaged. He has known her

all her life, and the Duchess also is interested in her, and has generously befriended her."

"Mother," Mr. Bosc exclaimed, "I have my doubts. I certainly was given to understand that the Duke was acting for the Duchess, and until to-night I never questioned the fact, but now—I don't know. My confidence has received a shock. The Duke does so much more than is necessary——"

"He has always been a little fussy, dear, has he not?" she put in.

"He has been more than fussy about Ella. He has been nervous and anxious. I noticed from the first that he was nervous and anxious; my reports have never been full enough to satisfy him; but I thought it was because the Duchess was difficult to deal with. Now I doubt if the Duchess counts in the matter at all, or concerns herself. It is Ella. He is ready to gratify her every whim."

"But Aloysius, *dear!* You surely have no doubt about Ella?"

"Oh, no, no, no! But I have fears for her."

"But, dearest, the Duke is the most respectable of men. Throughout his career never a word has been breathed against his good name. From his youth upwards his record has been unimpeachable."

Mr. Bosc knew better. When he was a junior some confidential business had come into the office connected with a young waiting woman, a companion or something of Lady Alicia Brabant's. He remembered the incident now. The details had not passed through his hands, and he had not thought much of the case at the time. The business of many great families was in the hands of his firm, and cases of compensation offered to young women who had been compromised were not uncommon. This was a case of the kind and the Duke had been implicated. Certainly his record was not unimpeachable. In those days he had had the run of that house, and he had the run of that house still, apparently. "The dog returns to his vomit," thought Mr. Bosc, but professional honour tied his tongue. Another thing recurred to him now, too, the proposal he had had to make to Ella with regard to the Duke's first visit, and his own dislike of it. Supposing nothing had come of it, it had lapsed from his memory, but here was new light on that arrangement.

His mother read in his face that his silence was not acquiescent, and she was anxious to clear his mind of the doubt

that tormented him. "His record is unimpeachable," she repeated.

"Even as a young man he was careful, yes," Mr. Bosc answered bitterly.

"Well, at any rate, Ella is incorruptible," his mother rejoined emphatically.

But this did not meet the case. Mr. Bosc, in his practice, had come across wives utterly corrupted by their husbands, and mistresses who had been preserved with high respect from the taint of vice.

"The mind is not necessarily corrupted by an irregular association, mother," he said; "and there is no knowing the length a woman may be persuaded to go in love and gratitude when she has no religious principle to determine the limit of her sacrifice. There need be no more in an equivocal position to shock the refinement of her mind than there is in marriage."

"Then you do doubt Ella!" his mother exclaimed, indignantly.

"Mother," he said tragically, "the Duke is a dark horse."

He paused upon the expression, pleased with it. It smacked of intrigue, and romance was latent in his legal make-up. Material for romance had come into his office in plenty, and he had imbibed a taste for it. The phrase was new to him in the sense that had brought it home to him. Dark horses there had been in lives he wotted of as an onlooker, but this dark horse had come into his own life and made him a participant in the plot; set him adventuring on his own account, the willing agent of the happy ending. And in himself, even as the words left his lips, there arose the sublime determination. He swore himself in as Ella's knight-defender, prepared to rescue her at all hazards to himself.

His mother, watching him, saw in his face an excitement she had never seen there before. In spite of twitching nose and blinking eyes, the long, lean, grey-haired lawyer man at that moment showed heroic.

CHAPTER VI

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

1

Col Drindon's defection from his set was the most stirring event of the time in town and country-house. Rumour had

it first of all that it was his friends he had thrown out of the window. But this was a short-lived sensation, and the next thing was felt to be flat. Col was discovered to be hand-in-glove with Paul McAllen Ray and "that canting set" about Lord Imlac; so the whole business resolved itself into nothing more exciting than a case of conversion, which was disgusting. Nothing worth mentioning was anticipated after this, and Col would have been forgotten had it been possible for Col to do things like anybody else, but this was not possible. The new bent of his mind, like the old one, was subject to antic impulses, and the ingenuity with which he brought the most unlikely people to their knees at the most unexpected times and in the most inconvenient places, made him a terror to be avoided without being lost sight of, lest, lying in ambush, he should catch the unwary and flay them in his zeal.

There was dole at the Land and Leisure Club among Col's contemporaries, and even the Greyheads were in something of a ferment. In the language of his associates Col was the sort of fellow who wouldn't do a nasty thing, and the phrase, expanded to the extent they meant, contained a whole code of honour, minus sobriety and continence. That Col should sicken of his own depravity was inexplicable, yet comments flowed freely. The wastrels called it "off-side," and said, "he'd gone back on them"; the more manly, in whom high possibilities still survived, felt themselves pulled up with a jerk. They were shy to confess it, but things which they had hitherto never bothered about suddenly showed "rotten." On the surface they were no more for "taking stock in religion" than they had ever been, and they were as intolerant of sentiment, of showing feeling, and as ashamed to be serious about anything, as they ever were; but in the better sort some leaven was working, which produced discomfort and prognosticated change. Would it be for the better? That was the question. Gregor Strangworth, of the leisure class himself by birth, but, by the grace of God, freed from its prejudices and inhumanity, and beyond it in breadth of outlook and grasp of possibilities, was restless and anxious. Already, perceived by him and his like, a reaction was setting in against the stultifying materialism of the day, with its gospel of brute force. The subtle appeal of the Higher Powers was abroad, and the spiritual was preparing to fight for its life in man against his lower animal nature. Afar off there were indications of a terrible crisis impending, of

a culminating struggle to come. The prospect was twofold, good and bad. Should the spiritual prevail by bringing home to the world at large the degrading thraldom of brute force for the brutal thing it is, it would be as wings to mankind on which they must mount to heights attained so far only by the rarest souls; but, failing the nobler result, our modern civilisation, still relying on brute force as all the older civilisations had relied upon it, would be left to reel, as they had reeled, "back into the beast, and be no more,"—while the Spirit, again driven forth, yet patient as ever, must elsewhere recommence the colossal attempt to redeem man by saving him from himself.

Mr. Strangworth stopped a moment one afternoon in the doorway of the smoking-room most frequented by the younger members of the Club, and looked around. The atmosphere was thick with smoke, and many idlers were lounging about. Some were flushed and dyspeptic, gorged with heavy luncheons; others, with empty glasses beside them, slept stertorously. A few were glancing at newspapers; here and there two or three talked together. The last pleasure was "played out," and they were all marking time till the next came along, and finding it "beastly slow." A man stretched out full length on an easy-chair near the door accused The O'Haleron of mugging for an exam. The O'Haleron resented the imputation. For to get there with ease, wherever "there" might be, was what his set expected of themselves. Their ideal was to arrive by inspiration like the heaven-born genius of a young lady's novel who is exempt from preliminary training. That this was possible was not altogether an illusion, for they were sharp at a chance, seldom failed for want of self-assurance, and when only pluck was necessary, they stayed. Their way was to carry things with a high hand, and if brute force were not the only source of power on which they relied, at all events it was the one that they most admired. Where they failed was in mental effort, hence the paucity of leaders among them. Gallant soldiers they made, and generous enemies, but few of them ever knew enough of the profession of arms to be distinguished commanders; and in other pursuits, when they were not failures, it was because, with exceptional moral courage, they had struck out for themselves, regardless of the habits of their caste.

Gregor Strangworth glanced at the scene with distaste, then turned away, and found Jaspar Brastaby, lithe, and alert as a panther, at his elbow.

"Don't see it," said Mr. Harkles.

"You wouldn't, my Julius," Lord Terry chuckled, as if he saw it himself.

"You mean?" the Duke queried. "But I know. The Land and Leisure Club, perched high and dry on ancient precedent, has yet to realise that progress has left it behind. Governing class? There's no such thing. Parties, yes, a survival. Fighting for their lives. Doomed. The community is voicing its own requirements to-day. Used to say one half of the world didn't know how the other half lived——"

"The one half would rather not know," Mr. Strangworth interjected. "The governing class, which you say is extinct——"

"Effete," said the Duke.

"Oh, surely not!" Mr. Harkles exclaimed in horror.

"Bear up, my Julius," Lord Terry grinned. "Not until after you the deluge. There's enough of us still for all the countenance you require to keep you atop. You were saying, Strangworth?——"

"I was going to say that the profound ignorance of the conditions of working-class life shown by men in office, is a scandal."

"Not by men in office only," said the Duke. "The comfortable middle-class makes strenuous efforts to preserve its ignorance too. Apes us. Aims, as we've always aimed, at securing the best of everything for itself, regardless. Echoes our catchpenny pronouncements. Shouts down inconvenient reformers with abusive epithets. Or would if it could. But there's no gagging to be done for long nowadays. No more getting complainants out of the way by hanging or flogging or transporting them, as in the good old days when they objected to be robbed of their Commons. They came cap in hand then, humbly begging for justice, now they come armed to demand it. We've got to attend to them, or worse will come of it. Lordly assumption of superiority based on wrested privileges fails to impress. We've got to do better or to go. Eh, Strangworth?"

Mr. Strangworth nodded. "Yes," he said. "The knowledge which is to be power in the future is the knowledge gathered by sympathetic insight. 'If I lose myself I find myself,' will be the safest way to the top of the tree. The Christ Spirit is coming into its own. Col's conversion is symptomatic, the extreme of what promises to be a common occurrence. Society has dipped down to the lowest. It has been mired that it might be made to realise the foulness of corruption. But look about you.

See the signs of reaction. It has already set in. Take your modern hero of your modern novel. Not so very long ago, the hero was the dirtiest of young men——"

"Decadents would have him so still," said the Duke.

"Decadents don't appeal to the normal man and woman. They're a discredited crew, and only speak for themselves. What do you find the hero of the normal sort? Clean! The women began it, and were plentifully bespattered with mud for daring, but they stuck to it. They exposed the inside of the cup and the platter, the dirt and the disease. They ridiculed the accepted impossibility. 'There's no reforming a rotten constitution,' they said. 'Let the mentally and physically tainted be set apart, and give us clean men.' And now it's the men themselves who are writing each other up clean."

"Good time coming, eh?" said the Duke, perfunctorily.

Lord Terry was vaguely reminded of an occasion. *"Je connais cette chanson-là,"* he began. "Let me see, who sprung it on me first? Oh, you, Ninny, one night I fell in with you. Clean young men, pah! Damn rot—at least," he added piously, "I thought so then. Now I know better." He drew down his shaggy brows reminiscently, then suddenly laughed. "My Julius," he exclaimed, "that night! D'ye remember? We finished it up together and danced—

Torroddle, torroddle, toroll—

Oh Lord, d'ye remember?"

Mr. Harkles smiled discreetly.

2

During the winter the Corner House, seen of the many from without, held its own as something exceptional, and continued to be a centre of attraction to the few. Also it became a centre of gossip. Rumour, finding nothing new to take out in the way of garbage for greedy curiosity to batten upon, changed its direction, and brought into Ella every item of news and all the reports that excited Society. She discovered much monotony in the chronicle. Incidents varied, but for the most part everything that was said, done, or thought redounded to somebody's discredit. If it could not be denied that an act was good in itself, the tendency was to set it down to a bad motive. To

curry favour or make other personal profit was apparently held to be the ruling purpose. Society holding up the mirror to itself, saw reflected for the most part corruption and self-interest only. As Ella's acquaintance with the mind of Society ripened into intimacy she sickened of it, and blessed the foresight which had placed her aloof, out of the swim, though in full view of it.

But these, on the whole, were the happiest days she had had since she came to London. Society still flocked to her Wednesdays, but on other days her clients were few. She had busy mornings superintending and doing office work, and during the afternoon she remained "on hand" in the showroom, but was oftenest alone save for the Argus-Eyed and Miss Hildenborough, who also remained at their posts for form's sake, keeping the shop open,—the Argus-Eyed at her high desk crocheting, and Miss Hildenborough seated on the edge of the platform at her feet, sometimes reading aloud, sometimes sewing. When they talked it was in undertones, as if they feared to break the silence which reigned in the big bare, beautiful room.

During the long hours Ella sat in the window-recess, whence she could see who approached from either direction, her fingers busy, her mind too, the sense of waiting was strong upon her. There she sat, with her indomitable will hard set, weaving into her work—what? Relying on intellect uninformed by the spirit, she habitually suppressed the emotional side of her nature that her mind might be clear to reason. So far, in the whirlpool of sensuality which was the life of the society about her, her own safeguard was her object. To have an object in life and the will to pursue it, is to be protected from the diversion of irrelevant temptation. She did not pray. She appealed for help and countenance neither to earth nor heaven. Both, from her outlook, sanctioned the wrongs she resented. She relied on herself alone. And the more she saw of the world the stronger grew her conviction that the power she aimed at was only to be secured by wealth and position, such wealth and position as Melton stood for. It was for Melton she was waiting, though as the time wore on, it was less Melton the man that she thought of than Melton the Marquis, the means to her end. The position to which he could raise her was the all-important thing. She supposed herself to be in love with him, and attached no significance to the fact that he was become but an item in the long

catalogue of the advantages he had to offer her. What did cross her mind at times was his unlikeness to his father. The comparison frequently presented itself after one of the Duke's visits. She did not compare them in appearance. That Melton looked distinguished and the Duke commonplace weighed with her not at all. What she contrasted was their companionableness. She had never felt at her best with Melton as she did with the Duke. Apparently, she concluded, sincerely regarding a man made his company pleasanter than being in love with him. Had she understood herself she must have perceived that all of her heart that was given away as yet, she had given to the Duke.

Of the younger men about her the only one she really cared for was Col Drindon. When she heard of his conversion she mourned for him as for a lost friend. Col, as she imagined him, with all his delightful boyishness and inconsequence gone, and, in their stead, all that she had no sympathy with in the attitude towards life and the conversation of Mr. Strangworth and the Boscs—Col, so changed, had no attraction for her—so she assured herself; yet she was sore at the thought that apparently she had lost her attraction for Col, since he came to see her no more.

But he had not deserted her, though it was not until the days began to lengthen that she saw him again. When at last he came, late one afternoon, he found her sitting in the window-recess, idling for once, her work on her lap, her thoughts, to judge by the expression of her face, far from the end of the street, on which her eyes were absently fixed. She did not hear him approach, and he stood for a little gazing at her, poet-and-lover-like, wrapt in contemplation. When presently she turned her head and saw him she gave him a questioning glance, unwelcoming and unsurprised. He might just have returned from a short errand, the result of which she was waiting to hear.

But she noticed a change in him. His dress was careful as ever, but soberer, and he looked thinner and older. The loss of his superfluous flesh had refined his appearance, and the spirituality which had hitherto been lacking to his face, shone there now and greatly improved him. Ella found him handsomer than she had been wont to think him.

"I may sit down?" he said, taking the only other chair in the recess without waiting for a reply, and carelessly tossing a newspaper he had in his hand on to her writing-table.

"Ella!"

At the sound of her name as he pronounced it her heart began to thump. She took up her work with a trembling hand, and began to ply her needle rapidly. That one word, charged with feeling, told her his errand. This was to be a decisive moment, it seemed. She had expected it at one time, and had supposed herself sufficiently practised in the art of rejecting men's addresses to dispose of Col, as of the rest of them, with the dignity and ease which resulted from having no heart in the matter. That she might have heart in the matter when it came to the point had not occurred to her, therefore she was taken unawares by the sudden thumping self-assertion of that organ. The one surprise for which Ella had not prepared herself was the surprise of love. She had no idea of loving her way to her end. Success she conceived to depend on hard-headed tenacity of purpose. But body, soul, and spirit we are, and body, soul, and spirit have each a portion in our development; the whole fabric of our being must be in use, or we cripple ourselves in some one particular. The healthy young are born pilgrims of love, and Ella's own rich womanhood all unconsciously craved its fulfilment. Therefore, now suddenly face to face with a man she could have loved, her senses asserted their right to aid in the perfecting of her nature.

"Ella, have you missed me all this time?" Col asked, and she answered, smiling involuntarily, "Yes," and sighed.

"Why do you sigh?"

"Oh, I don't know."

Col gazed at her. He found her lovelier even than he had dreamed her. She was sewing fast to cover her trepidation. It seemed to him that his coming meant nothing special to her. To what extent had she missed him? He sighed.

"Why do you sigh?" she asked in turn.

They looked into each other's eyes smilingly. Language means little to lovers.

"Don't you know?" he said.

"How should I know?" she answered, again intent upon her work.

"Not even the tenderest heart, and next our own,
Knows half the reason why we smile and sigh,"

he complained.

"Thank goodness—why should it?" she rejoined flippantly.

"Oh, surely you feel the barrier, the loneliness——"

"I think it would oftener be an inconvenience than anything to have the dearest heart at liberty to intrude upon one's privacy. A woman has at least one spot into which she can retire—as it is. She can retire into herself."

"You want me to go?"

"If you like."

"I don't like."

She looked closely into the piece of old lace she was mending, and then began to stitch again at express speed.

He leant forward and examined her work. "How wonderfully you do that!" he said. "I can't see where it was torn."

"Oh, I just put in the stitches that are missing," she said. "It is easy enough."

"Mock-modest girl!" he teased.

This was a return to their old bantering terms, and she began to recover herself.

"So you have gone over to the Imlac faction," she said.

He brightened. "You have heard the glad tidings, then?"

"Glad!" she exclaimed. "If you take to preaching at me, like Mr. Paul McAllen Ray, you will not gladden me much!"

"I hoped you would be glad to hear that I had seen the error of my ways," he reproached her.

"I know nothing about the error of your ways," she replied, "nor do I wish to know. I liked you as you were."

"I hope you will love me as I am."

Her heart began to beat again tumultuously.

"I have made a clean sweep of my old life because I love you," he continued. "I have kept away because—well, because I had a big spring-cleaning to do."

This lapse of tone gave her an excuse to laugh. He looked glum.

"Do be yourself," she said. "I liked you best in your natural pose."

"*Natural* pose!" he objected.

"As you were, then."

"I have always been in love with you."

"What is the use of talking to me about love?" she remonstrated. "I think of nothing but lace."

"The first time I saw you—do you remember——"

"You offered me a faded flower——"

"Because from the moment I saw you I could see nothing else."

She had nothing to say to that.

"My godmother that day gave the origin of lace as love and longing."

"Lace had an unconscious, rude beginning," Ella retorted. "It has slowly evolved, like ourselves, and everything else."

"Doubtless," he said. "But things evolve on their own lines. You have given up the pillow for the needle since I first knew you."

"I don't see the point. The *punto in Aria* is the more beautiful, the more precious——"

"That is not your reason, though you mayn't know it. You love the *punto in Aria* because you are unconsciously evolving on the same lines yourself——"

"I don't evolve," she interrupted. "I am just what I always was."

"You are developing nevertheless," he answered obstinately, the light of his own spiritual advance making evident to him the finer attributes of her nature resisting her efforts to suppress them. "You know the origin of *point de Venise*?"

"The legend of the sailor——"

"And the lovely treasures of the sea which he found when diving for coral, and brought to his sweetheart. When he had to sail away on a dangerous voyage he told her not to spoil her eyes with weeping but to use them to make a wedding-veil. Days and months and years went by, but love inspired her, and she wrought and wrought with her needle, reproducing the image of each gift of grasses, starfish, seaweed, and shell, so that at last, when he came, she stood at the altar in the loveliest veil ever seen. So, the exquisite, patternless, *point de Venise* was evolved at the instance of love and longing."

Ella was reminded of Melton, and her own long vigil. She turned to the window with a far-away look in her eyes. Col felt a jealous suspicion. He had seen that look before.

"You are waiting yourself," he exclaimed. "As you sit here working you have one eye on the street, watching—Oh, Ella, tell me?"

With the recollection of Melton her mind had relapsed into its habitual groove. Col must be silenced, and she saw a way.

"What am I watching and waiting for?" she answered lightly. "For love to come."

"I offer you love."

Ella's resolution began to falter. She saw Melton for the first

time less as a man than a purpose, the means to the attainment of her object in life. That object was nebulous. She had only so far vaguely defined it. She meant to succour the poor, to make their rich oppressors pay. To do that she must get into the enemy's country, but need she be a traitor to love? Of course not; but she must love the best man for her purpose. Col would have called himself complex, but to her he had hitherto seemed a simple creature. She saw his complexity as the complexity of a healthy, high-spirited boy, who acts naughtily on impulse when so disposed—a lovable boy, but impossible. She was armed by nature and had armed herself with art for her campaign in the enemy's country, but she had to get there on the arm of a man of the highest position and the amplest means. Col, she supposed, was not such a man.

"I offer you love," he urged, breaking in on her hesitation.

"I cannot accept your offer," she answered, her tone implying that she did not take him seriously.

"Ella, you don't understand," he pleaded. "Be serious. I ask you to marry me."

"Will you marry the lace trade as well?" she asked laughingly. "You might make yourself useful by using poking-sticks to adjust the plaits of ruffs, like Henry III of France, who was called *Gaudronneur des Collets de sa femme.*"

"I would do that, or turn a mangle for you were it necessary, but I can do better than that. I have some of the kind of thing to offer you that makes for happiness in this world. If it were only my poor self I had to depend on I should not have spoken. Love comes first, of course, but love itself is the fairer for a rich setting, and you, my most precious jewel, should have one. I have a house——"

"Have you!" she interrupted, jokingly.

"It is rather a nice little house—well, not exactly little."

"About what size?" she asked.

"Well, not so big as Buckingham Palace."

"A house of your own, just like a grown-up man!"

"Hang it all, Ella, I don't know how to put it. I don't want to boast of what I've got, and it sounds so d—deplorably like it. Love comes first, of course, but it is all the better if every other good thing is added thereto. I feel it most awful bathos, but I must just mention it. I am a rich man now. And I am heir to my Uncle Terry de Beach. It is a coronet I am offering you." The last words were spoken shamefacedly. "I am not

thinking you sordid and mercenary," he excused himself; "but I do think you wise, and such things count. I am sure you know just how much. They are something, but not everything."

He was appealing better than he knew to considerations that affected her deeply, though not vulgarly. It was an earldom against a duchy for her purpose. Col was lovable. Would not the one do as well as the other?—What the answer would have been is pretty certain, had not chance changed the direction of her thoughts. While she wavered her eye rested on the newspaper Col had cast aside, and she saw *"The Marquis of Melton Safe,"* printed in large type. Impulsively she caught up the paper, and read:

"The report of the Great Typhoon which recently raged in the China Sea has caused some anxiety to the family and friends of Lord Melton, who was known to be on his way to Japan, and was likely to have encountered the storm. Happily he has reached his destination safely, and is now the guest of the British Minister at Tokio. The Marquis will set out for home by way of America in a few days."

Melton on his way home, and the one obstacle to their marriage removed, since the Duke approved! It flashed into Ella's mind that, if Melton were true to her, she was bound to him by tacit agreement. At any rate she must wait. The colour flickered on her face. She accused herself of unfaith in that she had, for a moment, lost sight of the obligation.

Col, without ceremony, looked at the paragraph she was reading so eagerly. Love is not blind when there is anything to be seen that hurts. The rumour afloat about one of the Brabant boys recurred to him. Had she Melton's return in her mind when she said that she was waiting for love to come to her? "You are interested in Melton!" he exclaimed.

"Do you deny me the right?" she rejoined.

"I have a right to ask, I think. Is Melton my rival?"

She was silent.

"Look here, Ella," he exclaimed, jumping up. "I have made you an honourable offer. Come what may, whatever happens or has happened, my offer is open to you always. If you can love me, marry me. You will find me waiting on the chance and in the hope, till the day of my death."

He left her miserably disturbed, but not shaken in her purpose.

8

The Duke, on his way one evening to visit Lord Terry de Beach, who had been ill, fell in with Mr. Strangworth, also bent on the same neighbourly errand.

They found Lord Terry in the Museum he called his dressing-room, looking haggard but handsome in picturesque red robe and becoming Oriental turban. Mr. Harkles, perched on the hard, high stool on which he was habitually made to do penance for his sin of snobbishness, was keeping him company. He had been reading aloud to his noble friend from a heavy Bible which he had to hold up painfully, the help of table or stand to rest it on being forbidden. His relief on hearing the two gentlemen announced was great, but it would have been as much as his place was worth to have shown it. He did, however, venture to think of laying his burden aside, but his oppressor was down on him the moment he made the attempt.

"What the devil are you doin', Harkles?" he shouted. "Hold on to The Book, man!"

Mr. Harkles on his high stool hugging the weighty volume as if he loved it, looked, as he felt, ridiculous; and his tyrant kept a twinkling eye on him, enjoying the effect.

The Duke, when seated, had at his elbow a large Louis XIV table littered with a miscellaneous collection of *objets d'art* like a table in a curio shop, and at once his restless fingers began to busy themselves with dangerous unconcern for the safety of the fragile things he handled. While Lord Terry's symptoms were being inquired into and disposed of, he was examining a photograph of Lady Cruxhaven in Court Dress.

"Keeps her good looks," he observed.

"Red Ruin and the Breaking-Up of Laws, my Colin calls her. She's about as bad as they make 'em," Lord Terry rejoined, shaking his head virtuously.

"Very handsome," the Duke remarked absently.

"Not to my mind," said Mr. Strangworth. "Neither beauty nor ugliness is complete in the object; the idea attached to them is the main thing. Externals soon fail of their effect. And that kind of thing"—he indicated the picture contemptuously—"sooner or later fails of its effect."

"Later in my experience, and too late as a rule," Lord Terry chuckled. "She's a beast of a woman, though, that one. Look

at that thing in her hair—aigrette, don't you call it? I'm not very partic'lar myself all round, but I'm a sportsman, and I say a woman that wears an aigrette—ugh! She must be a brute."

"If she knows," said the Duke.

"Red Ruin knows right enough," Mr. Strangworth declared. "I heard her defend the brutality."

"There you are!" Lord Terry exclaimed, in a tone of disgust. "She hasn't the feelin's of a woman, no grace of womanhood left in her. And what I say is, when women ain't womanly they're brutes. The savin' grace of womanliness—did you ever reflect on the meanin' of that?"

"Beauty of goodness. Rescue us by the heart, eh?" the Duke ejaculated, and made to tear the portrait up.

"Hold on, Ninny," the Terrier roared at him. "What the devil are you doin'? She gave it me herself with her love. It's got her love on it, inscribed on that very table, here in this room, on the occasion—— A souvenir. My Julius!"

Mr. Harkles, with a polite "Allow me," captured the tender reminder, and restored it to its owner, who made a pretence of kissing it, then cast it aside, and resettled himself comfortably. The pantomime was typical of his dealings with such women, and its significance was not lost upon his guests.

The Duke spoke his thought aloud: "'Well is it that no child is born of thee.'"

"Your mind's always runnin' on the off-spring. I call you philoprogenitive mad, Ninny," said Lord Terry de Beach.

"'*Voyez-vous, nos enfants, nous sont bien necessaires, Seigneur.*' Victor Hugo, eh?" said the Duke, his eyes on the floor, an extra shade of sadness on his face.

Col Drindon, who was staying in the house, the better to attend to his uncle during his illness, came into the room at the moment. They had all seen him during the day, and further greetings were unnecessary. He sat on the arm of his uncle's chair, with his arm round the old gentleman's neck.

Lord Terry's face softened. "You're right, Ninny," he said, patting the young man's hand. "'*Nos enfants nous sont bien necessaires.*'"

Mr. Harkles clasped the Bible to his breast in a convulsive effort to recall something he was half reminded of, something connected with a missing two for which he was on the lookout. "*Nos enfants?*" He had it! His patron, drunkenly maundering "Colsh m'own son."

"How are your boys?" Lord Terry added. "No word of either of them marrying yet? Time enough, though."

"I'm for early marriages," said Mr. Strangworth.

"Never havin' married yourself, ha! ha!" Lord Terry chuckled. "There speaks theory, confidently."

"I don't think a man's age so much matters," said the Duke. "His choice is the important thing. I am for recommending young men to marry women on their merits, mental and moral, of course, but also, and particularly, physical."

"Regardless of caste?" Col asked eagerly.

"In exceptional cases," was the Duke's cautious reply.

"What would you call an exceptional case, sir?" Col inquired.

"Well—er,"—the Duke hesitated—"an exceptional combination of the qualifications I mentioned."

"Jove, I agree!" Lord Terry exclaimed, "to this extent. Marry perfection if you happen upon it, even in a shop."

"I am glad to hear you say that, sir!" said Col, "because now I know that you will approve of my marrying Ella Banks."

The Terrier bent his shaggy brows on his nephew, and grunted. He did not think him serious. Mr. Harkles looked at the Duke, but was disappointed of a sign, for the Duke was bending over the table at his elbow, busy with a penknife, and apparently had not heard.

Mr. Strangworth was not for taking Col seriously either. "Considered, by way of example, as a practical application of an abstract theory, your suggestion is worth discussing, Col," he said.

Col stood up. "Excuse me, I am not for discussing it," he replied. "I mean to take my uncle's advice and marry perfection if I can—Ella Banks, that is to say, if she will have me. She refuses at present, but my offer is open to her—and always will be."

Having spoken, he left the room.

Since the mention of Ella Banks Lord Terry had considerately abstained from looking at the Duke, but now he glanced at him involuntarily—and had his mind instantly diverted from the point at issue. "Damnation confound you, Ninny," he exclaimed. "What the devil are you doin' with that penknife? Cuttin' your accursed name on my *Louis Quatorze*, by the Lord God, as I'm a livin' sinner! I'd like to thrash you!"

The Duke, mindful of their school-days, hurriedly shut up the

penknife and put it in his pocket. "It wouldn't be the first time," he muttered reminiscently.

The gratified Terrier discharged a volley of oaths and his turban at him. The Duke caught the turban, and promptly returned it, making a neat hit.

"Good shot!" roared Lord Terry de Beach, and, falling back in his chair, he laughed till he cried.

Mr. Harkles, clasping the Bible to his proud breast, adroitly fielded the turban, and inwardly congratulated himself on being raised to Olympus, where the privileged may behold how the gods disport themselves in the sanctity of private life.

4

A few nights later the Duke looked in upon Ella. He found her seated in front of the fire, thinking, and fancied her attitude despondent.

Greetings over, and Ella reseated, he stood with his back to the fire looking down at her.

"So you refused Col Drindon," he began abruptly.

"*I* never said so," she exclaimed.

"No, you wouldn't. Not like you to give a man away. Give a man away—modern slang, eh?—He told his uncle in my presence. Afterwards discussed it with me. Met him prowling in the park, looking disturbed. Known him all his life. Lost both parents as a boy. Much with us afterwards, poor little chap. Natural, you see, that he should speak out to me when I asked him what was wrong. Said you'd refused him, but his offer was still open to you, and always would be." He waited, but as Ella did not reply, he repeated: "So you refused him?"

"The rejection of offers of marriage has become part of my business," she fenced, trying to make light of the matter.

The Duke considered her gravely. "Nice fellow, Col," he said at last. "Began rather badly. Led away. Turned over a new leaf suddenly. Suddenly, yes. I see now why. You, eh? Don't know if he'd make a good husband though. Ella, why did you refuse him?"

"He said it was a coronet he was offering me," she answered laughingly.

"You don't take him seriously?"

"But I like him," she protested. "I like him very much."

"Not enough to marry him, eh?" He looked at her wistfully.

"What would Lord Terry de Beach say to such a match?" she asked, fencing again.

"Oh, the Terrier? H'm." The Duke reflected. "If that is your only objection it might be got over."

"But it is not my only objection," she answered decidedly.

"That settles it—for the present at all events, eh? Perhaps only for the present?" Again he looked at her wistfully.

She was silent, unaware of the glance, her eyes on the fire.

He began to walk up and down the room. Presently, in passing her, he noticed one of her hairpins sticking out, and absently abstracted it. Knowing his propensity, she awaited developments with amusement. On the way back, he paused a moment behind her, and possessed himself of another hairpin. She was only wearing some few large tortoiseshell ones that night, and they were easily withdrawn. One by one, as he passed behind her, he removed them. She wondered what he would do with them.

After awhile he paused on the hearthrug.

"Difficult to know what to do for the best," he muttered, and tossed the whole handful into the fire.

"My hairpins!" Ella cried.

"Eh, what?" He looked at her vaguely, and at his empty hand. "Hairpins?"

"You threw them into the fire!"

"By Jove! So I did! Devil finds some mischief still, you know—proverb. Only remember seeing one,—sticking out. Can't bear to see them sticking out. Always want to put them right. Always do when it's Ann, or—h'm, h'm." The Duchess's name was taboo. "Forgot myself. Excuse me, my dear. I was thinking. Rather bothered just now. Do all sorts of things with my fingers when I'm bothered. Can't help it. Aid to thought."

The long coil of Ella's hair reached to the floor behind her. He absently picked it up, as he would have picked up her pocket-handkerchief, with the polite intention of returning it to her, but the feel of the soft silken tress suggested a new train of thought.

"Hair, eh?" He slowly unrolled the luminous coil, and spread it out as he spoke. "What's the quotation about the wonder that one little head could hold so much? Inside, of course. As great a wonder one little head with so much outside, eh?

Never saw such hair! Texture finest of the fine, colour dark and glossy as a raven's wing. Worn-out old comparison. Can't think of a better though."

Ella gathered up her hair, and twisted it round her head.

"How am I to fasten it up?" she wanted to know.

The Duke reached for the tongs, but it was too late; the hairpins had disappeared. "Must get you another set."

"Oh, no, thank you!" she exclaimed. "You would get me gold ones, and they would show in my hair."

"Gold ones? Well, yes. I suppose I should. Habit. Odd thing, too. Never touched dark hair before—except the boys'. Ninian, Eustace. Black enough, theirs."

"Isn't it strange that my hair should be so black?" Ella said. "My mother's hair was fair, they tell me, and my father's hair was red."

"Your father's hair was red," the Duke said slowly. "Red," he repeated.

Ella, on her own people, like the rest of us, was apt to be discursive. She pursued the subject: "My half-brother Robert has black hair, though, but then his mother's hair was black."

The Duke drew a chair up to the fire, sat down, and reflected. "Old age!" he ejaculated. "Dotage coming on. Dotty thing to do. Dotty—barbarous modern slang. Expressive, though. Not the same thing as dotage. May be dotty all your life."

Ella perceived that his mind was running on the destruction of her hairpins. "Absent-mindedness is neither dottiness nor dotage," she consoled him; "and, anyway, it seems to me that your Grace grows younger every day."

A passing gleam of gratification brightened the settled melancholy of his face. "My Grace!" he exclaimed. "Must it always be my Grace to you, Ella?"

"Always," she said, with all the affection she felt for him shining in her eyes. "Mine." She lingered lovingly on the word.

"That takes the sting out of it," he said, speaking to himself.

There was a pause, then he began again: "Ella, I would like you to—well, er, it is difficult to say. But let me tell you a man does not like to be thought of only as a duke."

She looked at him, looked at the fire, looked at him again, and smiled. "Dare I tell you——" she began hesitatingly.

"Yes, tell me. Speak your mind to me, as if—as if I were—

well, as to one in whom you can confide, on whose sympathy you can rely, always."

"I have never once, since the day you first spoke to me so kindly at Red Rose Farm—never once thought of you only as a duke. I do not think of you at all as a duke in relation to me. I have never expressed it to myself, but to me you are——"

"Dear, Ella?"

"Yes. Near and dear."

Without looking at her, he reached for her hand, pressed it, and let it go.

Suddenly, she felt chilled. The fire had burnt hollow. She knelt on the rug, and heaped the embers together with the tongs. Still kneeling, she cast a startled, apprehensive glance over her shoulder.

"What is it, Ella?" he asked, glancing in the same direction.

"Don't you feel it?" she answered. "Don't you feel as if we were not alone?"

He looked round, then put his arm about her as she knelt beside him. "Tell me what you feel," he said.

"I feel," she answered unexpectedly, "I feel—happy."

"Is it alarming to feel happy?" he asked with his melancholy smile, drawing her head to his shoulder.

She nestled close to him. "I am not alarmed," she said. "I feel protected."

"But something frightened you."

"Startled," she corrected him. "Awed. But not afraid."

"Have you felt this—er—happiness before?"

"Not this happiness. It is the nearness to you that makes me happy. It is as if I belonged to you. Oh, I should love to belong to you, and have all the world know it!"

Melton and marriage were in her mind, and a gleam of hope that he might now at last express his approval.

And he was fain to speak, but to very different effect. There was something he longed to tell, something he would have told her had she not explicitly made it a condition that all the world should know it. That was the utterance of the hard, high puritan strain in her character. He might not lose her love, but he must inevitably lose her respect, make her inevitably, considering her principles, despise both herself and him. Best let well alone.

With an effort he asked again what had startled her.

"I wish I knew," she answered. "It has happened before.

Several times I have felt as if there were something—someone—I could not see—near me—who sees me. When I look at Lady Alicia's portrait, it is sometimes as if she herself, not her portrait—— Oh, I can't explain it! It must be some disorder of my brain."

He pooh-poohed this.

"But can you explain it?" she asked earnestly, settling herself at his feet, and clasping her hands on his knee.

He looked down into her upturned face, delighting in its loveliness.

"Do you believe in the supernatural?" she urged.

He collected his thoughts. "If you mean by that do I believe in an unseen, inhabited world about us, I do. I believe, too, that some few people are capable of rising to heights of perception beyond the reach of the faculties of ordinary mortals. Second sight, and that sort of thing. Can't doubt it. Several instances in my own family. And your friend Ursula Pratt. A visionary. So was my sister Alicia." He paused, then added: "This was her home."

"I don't believe in ghosts," Ella exclaimed. "Yet I fancy"—this was said on reflection, in a hesitating tone—"I fancy at times, in spite of myself, that Lady Alicia is here, that she wants to speak to me, that she would if I would let her. But I won't! I won't! I set my whole self to refuse. Why should she come? What can she have to say to me?"

"Do you feel her an enemy?"

"No. It is unthinkable that she should trouble about me, yet I feel that the influence is friendly. At the same time, too, a sense of danger, of something threatening comes over me. Oh, do you believe that the dead can come back to warn us? Mr. Strangworth says they can and do. I call it superstitious, yet when I feel as I did just now, I don't know. It is so very real. But I hate to believe it. Surely believing it is a sign of incipient insanity?"

"Not necessarily," he replied. "My sister, Strangworth, Ursula Pratt, sanest of the sane—salt of the earth."

"But good and clever people may have some—lesion."

Screw loose, eh? Yes. They haven't though, and Alicia hadn't, nor you, my dearest. The faculty is a higher—further—faculty; peculiar to a few. Very few. A gift like music, or any other form of genius. Very wonderful, but nothing to be alarmed about. There! Your colour is coming back. Now,

be sensible about it. If you have the further faculty, well, you have it."

"But if I have it what shall I do with it?"

"Nothing, I should say. Don't think about it. Let it do for itself. Of course," he added, "we are told not to bury our talents."

"I see no practical purpose to which such a gift could be put," she answered thoughtfully. "But supposing some danger threatened your family, supposing this faculty—if I have it—made it possible for a warning to be sent to you through me——?"

"You would lend yourself—do your best to understand, eh? You would. Much as you hate the idea."

He sat a long time toying with her hair, deep in thought. She had turned her face to the fire, her head was resting against his knee.

"I wish you were not alone here," he said at last.

"Oh, I must be alone!" she exclaimed emphatically. "Don't, don't, please, make me have anyone here with me. I don't want anyone but you."

His hand rested on her head a moment, then he rose abruptly. "It is late," he said. "Here"—holding out his hands—"let me help you up. Sure you are all right now?"

"Couldn't be righter!" she answered lightly.

"Good-night, then. Stay—kiss me as if I were near and dear to you."

She kissed him on the lips: "Good-night!"

"God bless you! Good-night!" And he was gone.

5

Next day the Sliver told a strange story at the Land and Leisure Club. He said that, on his way home from a ball at daylight, the Duke had passed him on horseback, evidently just back from a long ride, for his horse was jaded. But the queer thing was that the Duke was in evening-dress, with his strapless trousers rucked up to his knees, and he looked as jaded as his horse.

The Duke's well-known eccentricity in the way of conduct and dress would have rendered the story probable had anyone else told it, but nobody believed the Sliver.

BOOK IV

She was his life,
The ocean to the river of his thoughts,
Which terminated all.

BYRON.

CHAPTER I

ELLA IS DISQUIETED——

1

"I CAN'T quite make Ella out," Mr. Bosc said to Mr. Strangworth. "There is Greek harmony in her character as in her physique—balance—but with something added which is essentially not Greek."

"The essential difference of the times," Mr. Strangworth decided.

"A latent something, I think," Mr. Bosc pursued, "which has yet to appear."

It was perhaps due to this perfect balance that Ella held her tongue about the plan she had conceived as the most practical for the accomplishment of the object to which she had dedicated her life. It was as if she had laid down rails for herself to run upon which must take her straight to her destination sooner or later. There was no mistaking the road, no turning aside from it. The perfection of her equilibrium safeguarded her from morbid anticipations. She had no more dread of accident than a locomotive engine; neither was she more conscious of a directing power. But she was not the locomotive. She was the passenger on business in a through train, booked to her journey's end. The scenery by the way might interest her, there might even be stoppages where she could get out for a little and move about; beauty spots where she would like to have lingered; a place now and then which tempted her for a moment to give up her enterprise altogether and stay for good. But this was only a passing thought, gone before the desire had time to resolve itself into action.

On short journeys people are impatient. They double their sense of time by counting the minutes. But when the way is long they resign themselves, and lose count of the hours. This was the case with Ella. Gradually she lost the sense of waiting, of merely doing something by the way. Each busy day, so

full of interest and occupation, sufficed for itself. Evidence of the usefulness of the work she was engaged upon was not wanting, and she began to attach importance to it. Had she spoken her mind fully to anyone qualified to advise her at this time, she might have had her eyes opened to the many advantages her independent position gave her for the carrying out of her project. Silent determination is the storehouse of strength, but to determine without the enlightenment which comes of open discussion, is to work in the dark. A certain amount of friction is necessary to keep things going, and it is by the clash of opposite opinions that those gleams are generated which illuminate a subject from every point of view. Knowledge without wisdom is not power, and wisdom is only to be collected in precious particles with patient sifting of the contents of many minds. Ella came in contact with many minds, but her silent determination kept her to her own rail, her eyes on her chosen goal, which, however, pleasantly circumstanced as she was, tended to become to her as heaven to the devout; a far-away possibility, highly desirable in itself, but less an object to be arrived at quickly than an end kept in view and to be ultimately attained when there is nothing else for it. A healthy-minded pilgrim is in no hurry to get to heaven.

Ella stayed in London that second autumn of her enterprise, contentedly busy. Mr. Bosc suggested change of scene, but Ella contended that it was change enough for her to have an empty city to herself. "Besides," she said, "things might happen in my absence"—by which she meant that Melton might arrive. There was always the possibility, but in these days she was prone to lose sight of it. Her own people were oftener in her thoughts than he was. She yearned for her half-brother Robert, for the old father toiling on his farm, and would often have paid them a flying visit had it been allowed. But this would have been contrary to the terms of her agreement with the Duchess, who had made it a condition of her establishment in London that she should not return to Pointz without permission. Ella had accepted the condition light-heartedly, as flattering to her hopes. If the Duchess had not feared for Melton, would she have banished Ella from the neighbourhood? Besides, what a futile precaution! What was to prevent their meeting in London? She might, however, have hesitated had she had any experience of home-sickness, or anticipated anything so offensive in the Duchess's attitude as her scornful

avoidance of the Corner House. She bitterly resented this slight, and in her pride would have suffered anything rather than ask a favour of the Duchess. Of course, the compact had to be honourably kept, but she sorely regretted it.

Her heart ached for home unbearably at times, for her own folk, for the long levels at Pointz where the curlew cried, for the desolate sand dunes and the rock-strewn shore, wave-beaten and beautiful to her; for the hills of Castlefield Saye and the dark pine woods with the moon hung low above in a cloudless sky; for the lattice window at Red Rose Farm where she had been wont to sit and work and watch and dream; above all for the freshness of the sea-scented air and the sense of freedom, that perfect possession of herself which it was not possible to enjoy in the imprisonment of her crowded, stuffy, London life. Her best solace was her purse. She could help them at home substantially now, and the price in suffering that she paid for the power was mitigated by the pleasure of exercising it.

Some few people she knew lingered in town for various reasons, and others, passing through, came to see her or to meet friends, making the Corner House a place of rendezvous. Mr. Strangworth's string band still played for her delight on her Wednesdays. Sometimes he was her only guest, and these were occasions she greatly enjoyed, although the subject she would fain have avoided if she could, was prone to intrude. It was the religious, not the didactic note, to which she objected. Her own intellectual curiosity made her quick to appreciate the value of much of Mr. Strangworth's conversation, and he generally left her with some one pregnant phrase to reflect upon. He smiled at her dogmatism on the subject of the mind of Society, and warned her against sweeping generalisations. "The looker-on is aloof—detached," he said. "He may see most of the game, but he is without practical knowledge of it so long as he plays no part in it. He cannot feel the impulse which results in certain moves, therefore he is not in a position to justly appraise them."

"Representatives of all shades of opinion come here," she argued. "I gather honey from their various flowers of thought, and find poison in it."

"The Corner House has become a sort of clearing house to which people come to relieve their minds of anything that happens to be in them," he replied. "Not half the things said are

true expressions of opinion. The poison is often generated by some bitterness caused at the moment, and got rid of as soon as expressed, or it is a mere *jeu d'esprit*, the result of the reckless habit of playing with words without attaching any real importance to them. The best side of the human nature of the set you see most of—the idle rich—is so covered with conventional artifice that it does not manifest often or easily, but it has a best side all the same."

"Most of the manifestations *I* see are spurious," she complained, "with personal profit for their object. Self-interest is the prime motive I detect for Society's expressions of good feeling."

"Well," he conceded, "perfect disinterestedness is a rare virtue, but the most selfish have their moments, and one good deed argues the possibility of more to come. I suspect you of systematising. Don't! Leave yourself outlets in every direction—open spaces in your mind to be filled in when experience enables you to revise your first hasty conclusions on the subject of persons, motives, and events. You cannot systematise life without spoiling it, your own life especially. You must leave yourself room to grow, to expand. No one can judge of the extent to which he may expand if he give himself plenty of room. To order your course too exactly is to get into a groove."

When Ella decided to remain in town Mr. Bosc discovered that things urgently requiring his personal attention would prevent his taking a holiday that year. He came every day to the Corner House, and at unexpected times. He had done so ever since the incident of the latchkey, but never once had he encountered the Duke there again.

Lady Janet Brastaby, temporarily released from attendance on the Princess Anna, was spending the autumn at her cottage on the Thames, within driving distance, and came often. Since her first offer of friendship, she had steadily cultivated Ella's acquaintance. She was not one to make vain professions, and Ella felt sure of her, and admired, and liked her. Besides, the Duke favoured the intimacy.

Lord Terry de Beach was also much in town seeing to a Mission Hall and Night Shelter he was having erected for men in the slums. It was known at the Land and Leisure Club as The Terrier's Fire Insurance Office. When it was ready to be opened he telegraphed an invitation to his Julius to come and keep

house with him for a bit, and Mr. Harkles, who was in Scotland, showing men the newest right thing in dress for the moors, flew to him, elated by the prospect. But when he found that Lord Terry required him to make a public profession of his faith by preaching at the Mission Hall, he took to his bed, out of which he would only consent to be moved into an ambulance, by which means he escaped to a place of safety, leaving no address.

Lord Terry was not deceived as to the nature of Mr. Harkles's illness. He knew his Julius and how to recapture him when so disposed, therefore he extracted such stimulant for his peculiar sense of humour as the incident afforded at the moment, and troubled himself not at all.

"You can take a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink," he said; "neither can you make a man drink of the Waters of Life when he isn't thirstin' for 'em. But, damn it all, my Julius," he added, darkly apostrophising him, "a time will come!"

Col, too, was persistently on hand, but not obtrusively; rather in the background, like a husband or brother than as an importunate lover. He believed that the best way to win her was to make himself an accustomed, therefore a necessary, part of her equipment.

Lady Coombes, who had stayed in town to show that she was a middle-class woman unaffected by the habits of the aristocracy, also came; and Mrs. Filmer Dabbs, detained to "see to" her husband, who had broken his leg and could not be moved; and, of course, the Duke. The papers never discovered him in town, but he swung back and forth nevertheless, like an irregular pendulum, from Castlefield Saye, or wherever else he happened to have wandered, for the purpose of looking into things and seeing for himself, don't you know.

2

These busy days of calm content, these visits of congenial friends, these restful hours of quiet contemplation, without fear, without regret, stood to Ella as an Isle of the Blest in life's troubled sea, or as an oasis in its desert places, on which the favoured pilgrim is left to rest awhile untroubled. But to find yourself reflecting upon your blessings, to perceive that you have

much to be thankful for before you have done your work in the world, is never a good omen. When the powers above cease to be pestered for pity and help, they know that from their point of view there is something wrong, that you are not having your full share of suffering, and they hasten to repair the error; so that the state which you most desire to prolong is usually the precursor of an immediate change for the worse. This was what happened to Ella. No sooner was her object become to her as the distant view which gives distinction to a fixed abode, and the future a far-away prospect into the details of which she had no inclination to peer, than change was upon her. The Duke himself was the unconscious agent who roused her, with a word, from her happy content. He found her one night in her sitting-room, seated beside the fire, looking into it, tranquilly ruminating.

"Thinking, eh?" he exclaimed. "Future, I suppose. The eyes of youth—always on the future. Just come from Castlefield Saye."

He pulled up a chair and sat down.

"Any news?" she asked eagerly, meaning news from home.

"Lots," he said mechanically.

"Are they all well?"

"They——?"

"My people—at Red Rose Farm."

"Your people——" He looked at her, and then he looked into the fire.

"Your people," he repeated, when he had readjusted his thoughts. "At Red Rose Farm. Of course. All well? Yes. At least, I don't know. But no news is good news."

Her animation flickered out.

"At the Castle, though—that monkey Lena Kedlock!" He laughed silently. "She and Eustace went off and got married one morning. Came back to lunch. Broke the news by having themselves announced as 'Lord and Lady Eustace Brabant.' Rather a shock. Everybody reconciled now, though. Gave 'em a good send off."

"I am so glad," Ella said heartily. "I hope they'll be happy. They should be. She always said she should marry Lord Eustace."

"Arranged it herself, eh? Just like her! The monkey. But a good sort—language of the day. A woman through and through. And when a woman sets out to do a thing she does it."

"I am glad to hear you say that," said Ella.

"Oh, you'll carry out your intentions too, whatever they are," he assured her cheerfully.

A silence fell upon them for a little. Ella, reminded of her intentions, complaisantly reviewed them. The Duke's reflections were not exhilarating. His countenance became overcast.

"Another marriage has been arranged since I saw you last," he announced presently, but there was no jubilation now in his tone. "Ann—and Algernon Pointz."

"What!" she exclaimed. "Oh, poor little Lady Ann!"

"Eh, what? You don't approve?" He spoke sharply.

"Lena Kedlock described Captain Pointz in two words. She called him the Blond Beast.[1] His character is well known. No decent parent in my class would countenance——"

She pulled up and hung her head, expecting a ducal rebuke, but the Duke's head was hanging too.

"It's not in my power to prevent it," he said. "When the ladies of a family are determined—I've done my best." He paused upon this, then added slowly: "And so has Ninian."

Ella's heart bounded. It was a minute or two before she could speak indifferently.

"Lord Melton is at home, then?" she managed to say at last.

He nodded.

Melton had returned! All this time of watching and she had missed the announcement when it appeared! Melton had returned—had passed through London—and had not come to see her. Ella's heart contracted.

"Just back," the Duke was saying. "Hurried home first thing. Good chap, Ninian. Nice fellow."

Had he intended to reassure her the words could not have been better chosen. Of course, he would hurry home the first thing. The Brabants were notoriously a united family, and the Duchess was an exacting mother.

Ella ached to ask questions, but that being impossible, she willed the Duke to pursue the subject. He did not, however.

"How have you been?" he asked presently, examining her face as he spoke. "Any experiences lately, eh? Ghostly, you know."

She found it difficult to collect her thoughts. To gain time she knelt on the hearthrug and stirred the fire, he watching

[1] See *Adnam's Orchard.*

her, as always, admiringly. As he did so the habitual shade of melancholy deepened on his kind, plain face.

Still kneeling, she looked up at him with a deprecating smile. "I am afraid you think me fanciful," she said. "I should hate to be thought fanciful."

"Then you suspect yourself?" he concluded. "Fancifulness. Accompaniment of imagination. Imagination is a great gift. Nothing done without imagination; socially, artistically, scientifically. Has its dangers, of course. Must keep an eye on yourself to steer clear of them. Must be careful to distinguish between fact and fancy."

"I try to. But something in this house makes it difficult. The moment I entered it the fancy seized me that I had been here before."

She sat down on the rug at his feet and looked into the fire.

"Do mind that hot fire! Your eyes! Your precious eyes! Must take care of them, you know, eh? Take great care of them."

She drew back from the danger zone and beamed up at him. "That was what you said the first time I saw you!" she reminded him.

"The first time, eh?"

She thought he was questioning her accuracy, and corrected herself. "I should have said the first time that you came to see me. I had seen you before, of course. I saw you every Sunday in church."

"Did you?" he said. "I never saw you looking at me."

"All the same I saw you, and you used to look at me."

"I did," said the Duke. "I wondered sometimes what you were thinking about. Sermon times. You were not listening."

"I was in a way, but they were not arresting sermons, and they were unpractical. I only remember one that touched on the conduct of life. The text was *Be sure your sin will find you out.*"

The Duke was silent for so long that she turned to look at him. He had possessed himself of a newspaper, and was tearing it up into tiny fragments, carefully, as if afraid of being heard.

Ella thought he had lost interest in the subject, and waited for him to change it.

"The first time I came to see you," he said at last, and stopped there.

The words were evidently the outcome of something he had in

his mind to which Ella had no clue, but she judged from the expression of his face and the nervous movement of his hands, that it was not a pleasant something, and she thought to divert his mind.

"You asked me if I had had fancies before I came here," she said. "That first time you came to see me you wore a pin, a fox's head with ruby eyes, and I fancied I had seen it before."

He gave her a searching glance.

"I said so," she added, "and you covered the pin with your hands as if to protect it, and I felt—oh!"

There was a pause, then he slipped from the subject.

"You talked like a book about women's rights, I remember," he said.

"I have come a long way since then!" she answered suggestively. But he did not take up the challenge. His countenance relaxed, however, and thinking that she had restored his good humour, she determined, on the impulse of the moment, to make him speak out at last, to bring him to the point and win from him confirmation in so many words of her belief that he knew and approved of Melton's suit.

"I recollect another fancy," she began nervously. "I had it the day of that sermon *Be sure your sin.*"

"How is it you remember that?" he asked.

"Oh, because——" she hesitated, embarrassed. She had reason to remember that day precisely, but she could not explain. "What was I going to say?" she stumbled on. "Oh, I know! Another fancy. You know the narrow wooden bridge across the Brook which divides your demesne from Pointz, and the gap in the beech-trees through which you look up to the green slope at the top of the Coastguard's Death? I was going home that way after church, and from the bridge I distinctly saw Lord Melton standing on the edge of the cliff." Her breath caught here, and it was with difficulty that she added, "But it could not have been Lord Melton."

"Why?" the Duke asked.

"Because he was standing beside me."

There was a pause during which her heart beat to suffocation. Surely now he must speak out!

The Duke deliberately gathered up the newspaper and the fragments he had torn from it, deliberately screwed them up into a tight ball, threw it into the fire and watched the flames attack it.

"It must have been Eustace," he said at last meditatively. "They are mistaken for each other sometimes." Then he straightened himself and looked at Ella. "Standing on the bridge with Melton, eh?" he said. "Didn't know you knew him."

It seemed to Ella that the room heaved, that she was caught up and whirled away at a terrific rate to an immense distance, yet at the same time she saw the ball of paper burning in the grate, and was aware of the Duke with the poker in his hand helping the flames.

"Nice fellow, Ninian," he was saying. "Glad to have him home again."

Obviously, that she knew Melton was as much a matter of indifference to the Duke as her casual acquaintance with any other young man would have been.

The noises in the street suddenly became obtrusive. Clattering horses' hoofs and rolling wheels, voices and skurrying feet, distinct sounds close at hand, incessant distant hum, and the clang of one great bell; the voice of the whole teeming city, but not of the City Joyous of her dreams. Never again would it be the City Joyous of her dreams. The great bell, which hitherto had clanged her messages of encouragement, was tolling now—tolling, tolling,—tolling a knell. Death and burial, death and burial!

But the balance of Ella's mind was not to be upset by a shock, however great. Her lookout was changed, that was all. The Duke had not known of her acquaintance with Melton, and, now that he knew, it did not occur to him that they might be in love with each other, therefore his approval of their marriage had yet to be won.

In so many words she summed up the position to herself, then she rose.

The Duke, in his play with the poker, had scattered blackened fragments of calcined paper all over the hearth. "See what a mess you have made!" she exclaimed.

"A mess, eh?" he rejoined, looking ruefully at his handiwork. "Not the first mess I have made in my life. Hope it will be the last. Isn't there a brush? What's that in the corner—that little brass toy? A brush! That's it. No. I'll do it myself." He busied himself with the brush, then stood contemplating the clean-swept hearth.

"If we only could clean up all the messes we make, and no

one the worse," he exclaimed. "Don't make a mess of things, Ella. Look before you leap—that is to say, be advised." He drew her to him. "You are pale to-night, my dearest," he said, kissing her on either cheek. "Tired? I've been keeping you up. Thoughtless. Forgive me. And get to bed. Good-night! Good-night!"

She heard him hurry off as if the rate at which he went would shorten the time he had kept her up.

"Thoughtless?" No, never! All thought for her, and care and kindness. "Don't make a mess of things, Ella." She had not made a mess of anything, but she had done something more shattering to her pride, something more destructive of her confidence in herself, the source of all her success. She had made a mistake. The airy castle of her hopes had been raised on a rotten foundation, and had crumbled into dust at a breath, leaving her just where she was at the outset of her enterprise, without a single certainty to rely upon. Stay, though. She had the certainty of the Duke's affection, of the pleasure it gave him to gratify her every wish. He had betrayed anxiety about her position, a desire to set her on high. He had not thought Col Drindon's offer a condescension, and Col was as well-born as the Brabants. To refuse to countenance her marriage with his son would be inconsistent. According to his oft-expressed views on the subject of marriage, her splendid health and intellect made her a desirable wife for any man. And he respected her; therefore what reasonable objection could he make? None that she could see. On the contrary, his every social principle argued for his approval of the match.

But without his approval she vowed that she would not marry Melton; she owed the Duke too much for that.

CHAPTER II

IN SUSPENSE, WITH THE GLASS GOING DOWN

1

THE next Wednesday found Ella in her showroom awaiting the arrival of her guests, should any come, and serene as ever outwardly, but no longer easy in her mind. There were to be no more days of tranquil waiting, no calmly contemplated distant

future. She lived now in a present tense with uncertainty, each day a sentry-go of conscious looking-out.

Mrs. Pilbeam at her desk, with Miss Hildenborough standing beside her, was resting her Argus-eyes. The musicians had taken their places in the gallery and were tuning their instruments, and Ella, at the far end of the room, paced slowly to and fro.

Mrs. Pilbeam slipped her crochet out of the desk. "Don't seem like havin' a crowd to-day," she remarked.

Miss Hildenborough seated herself on the edge of the platform. "I'm just as glad," she rejoined, and yawned, then started to attention. "What's that?" she exclaimed.

The Argus-Eyed listened. "There's nothing," she gave as the result. "Don't you be jumpy, Miss Hildenborough."

"I'm not jumpy no more than yourself, Mrs. Pilbeam," Miss Hildenborough snapped. "And I'm not deaf, neither."

"Which is as much as to say that I am," Mrs. Pilbeam bridled.

"Oh, if the cap fits!" Miss Hildenborough rejoined sarcastically. "But there now—hark! It *is!*"

Again Mrs. Pilbeam listened. "I own up," she said generously. "There's a band. But what's that to shout about?"

"It's Mr. Strangworth's band and he's coming!" Miss Hildenborough cried excitedly.

"Well, and if he is, what's it to you all in a flutter?" Mrs. Pilbeam reproved her.

Miss Hildenborough hugged herself. "I shall see him!" she said.

"He won't see you, then." Mrs. Pilbeam spoke drily, but repented, and wiped out the offence with a smile, adding indulgently: "I'm surprised at you, Miss Hildenborough!"

"He's my ideel," Miss Hildenborough confessed.

"Not to mention his millions," the Argus-Eyed shrewdly insinuated.

But Miss Hildenborough ignored the sordid suggestion.

"What chances some gels have!" she sighed, with envious eyes on Ella.

"And throw 'em away," said the Argus-Eyed, compressing her lips at the pity of it. "But he's elderly."

"He's no age at all," Miss Hildenborough stoutly defended.

"That makes him a mystery," said the Argus-Eyed, "and his millions may be mushrooms, I shouldn't wonder."

The music approached, an animated quick step, passed on, and died away in the distance.

"Well I never did!" Miss Hildenborough exclaimed. "He's given us the go-by. What's up? And our Miss Banks don't care a button. Look at her there, peacocking like a swan."

"For shame, Miss Hildenborough," the Argus-Eyed reproved her. "And don't you draw imperinces from unjust appearances. Our Miss Banks don't wear that good 'art of 'ers on her sleeve, though I'm of the same opinion still. *He* as is *Him* 'asn't showed up yet, but 'e's there right enough, in the background."

Mrs. Pilbeam smoothed the aspirate out of her speech as a rule in the intimacy of private life, using it only for emphasis, but when she did, it came out like a blast of compressed air.

"You said just now," Miss Hildenborough was beginning—

But Mrs. Pilbeam caught her up sharply. "Oh, I said! You want to arguefy, Miss Hildenborough, that's what you're at, and that's a thing I can't abide," and she gave Miss Hildenborough "a look!"

Miss Hildenborough returned the look with spirit, but on the instant felt herself struck all of a heap. "Mrs. Pilbeam," she exclaimed, clasping her hands, "whatever *has* come to us! You and me have lived together going on two years and never a word, and here, all for nothing, we've been going on at each other as never was. What's got into the place? It doesn't feel the same, and no more do we. Once, in days gone by, if you'd put up an altar there"—she gracefully indicated the daïs—"it would have seemed natural and right and proper; but, now, could I pray here? No! Not was it ever so. I'd walk out if you asked me."

Mrs. Pilbeam frowned, discomfited, leant back in her chair and surveyed the room. "There *is* a somethin'," she said. "I feel it 'ere"—she clasped her ample bosom—"it's like when there's thunder in the air."

Ella had approached and heard the last words. Was her own disquietude spreading to these two good friends? That must be stopped at any rate, or everything would go wrong. She made a sign to the musicians' gallery.

"Begin!" she called up, then turning to Mrs. Pilbeam, she said gaily, "I am just in the mood for music. I shall enjoy myself to-day if nobody comes."

She slid away airily across the polished floor.

"She's all right at all events," said Miss Hildenborough, brightening. "'Her bright smile haunts me still.'"

Mrs. Pilbeam took up her crochet. "We're bilious, I expect, both of us—one, two, three, four, five——" and she trebled. "It's that pie. I never could do with beefsteak and kidney pie, not even when it's the best rump."

Scattered notes of music, round and clear as drops of rain with the sun on them, passed into a pellucid dancing measure, to which the heart, persuaded, tripped it lightly and the feet beat time; and, as if charmed to the spot, a sunbeam shot across the room, revealing its splendours. Ella sat apart, her eyes on the shining depths of the floor, in which the moulded ceiling and hanging lustres were mirrored upside down, her pose eloquent of rapt attention. But she was not listening to the music, only conscious of it; as it wrought upon her the fret of the last few days fell from her, and the wonted balance of her being was restored. It did not matter that the Duke had yet to be won, that Melton tarried, that uncertainty still shadowed her path. Uncertainty shadows the smoothest way till the goal is reached, the uncertainty of life. But she was the Winged Victory, and, if she lived, she must arrive!

Voices claimed her attention. Lady Janet Brastaby was standing in the doorway. Ella rose reluctantly, as one baulked of success by an interruption. On the strength of that music she felt that she could have willed the world to her purpose had she but been left alone long enough.

Lady Janet's natural elegance was set off as usual by the calculated simplicity of her dress. "I don't know how she does it, she dresses so plain," Mrs. Filmer Dabbs,—whose eye was not in or she would have appreciated the cost of that "plainness"—was wont to say. "Just a black face-cloth coat and skirt, with a little black toque, and a white blouse showing with a bit of lace on it, and a pendant on a little gold chain; not another jewel, yet there she is, dressed, I assure you." Mrs. Dabbs failed to note such minor details as boots and gloves, and brightly burnished silver-grey hair setting off the delicate colouring of the young face; but perfection can be felt without being analysed, which is well, since Mrs. Dabbs's analysis, so far as it went, was destructive. Her secret feeling was that Lady Janet had no right to look so well, "not dressing suitable to her station," and she would have had her reform into obviously expensive clothes. Even her hair Mrs. Dabbs thought would

have been "the better for a touch of colour, which no one could object to at her age, poor thing."

Lady Janet had a friendly greeting for the Argus-Eyed and Miss Hildenborough, then, spying Ella, she flew to her.

"Pleasant, isn't she?" Miss Hildenborough observed. "But the reel sort always is. It's your would-be's that give themselves airs."

"One, two, three, four, five—some is and some isn't," said the Argus-Eyed, holding her crochet in suspense. "Some does and some doesn't. There's all sorts in every class, good and bad, nice and nasty. I've known the reel thing as disagreeable as dirt, and the other thing as pleasant as you like. It's just according. I know—six, seven, eight, nine, ten—there! If I haven't counted wrong. . . . Do, for goodness' sake, get something to do, Miss Hildenborough. It would put an angel about to see you 'anging around like you was paid to show you'd nothin' to do."

"Beefsteak and kidney pie," muttered Miss Hildenborough with a toss of her head, and made her escape; idly sauntering, to provoke her colleague; also, to show her own "independence."

2

Lady Janet drew Ella to a settee, into the corners of which they nestled comfortably.

"Caught you alone for a treat," she said. "What was that divine thing they were playing as I came in?"

"Oh, do you want to know?" said Ella. "I never care to know the label a composer attaches to his work. Music is full of messages to mankind, and our own may be lost to us if our minds are glued to the meaning suggested."

"You looked just now as if you had received your message, a something exalting," Lady Janet observed. "Is it impertinent to ask——?"

"My memory was refreshed," Ella answered. "Words wedded themselves to the music—

> *The innocent moon, that nothing does but shine,*
> *Moves all the labouring surges of the world.*

The idea is exalting. But as to a message—do you detect any?"

"Looking at you, yes," Lady Janet said. "A woman of incomparable beauty, set on high, moves all the labouring surges of men's minds."

" 'Set on high,' " said Ella significantly. "If Helen had been a cook, or Cleopatra a slave——?"

"Incomparable beauty is bound to be promoted——"

"To be an artist's nameless model! Who was the Venus of Milo?"

Lady Janet smiled. "At any rate," she said, "to be Cleopatra a woman must go one better than the passive moon. She must be able to will and to do. Beauty with a mind can move all the labouring surges of the world as she chooses, for good or ill. Helen was passive and only survives as a beautiful possession for which men fought. They obeyed Cleopatra."

"Cleopatra had the power and prestige of her position."

"Helen might have had the power of position had she had the wit to play her cards to that end."

This was Ella's faith formulated and rich in counsel. Did Lady Janet intend to advise? She spoke deliberately, and so carefully abstained from looking at Ella that Ella felt she expected some effect—the personal application probably, which promotes self-betrayal, and must not be spied upon. Ella's characteristic impulse made for concealment. She half rose as if reminded of a neglected duty. "You want to know the name of that piece," she said. "I'll go and ask."

"No, no, don't!" Lady Janet exclaimed. "There is rest and refreshment and hope and strength in your atmosphere. Let me breathe it undiluted while I can. The pestilent world and his wife may come and corrupt it at any moment. Don't move! Let me have the pure taste while I can to revive me. I've been having a horrid day of little things, an offer of marriage to be declined with thanks, among them. My money receives offers of marriage continually. White hair is no protection; money never grows old."

"Cynical," said Ella mechanically.

(She had the hall in full view, the folding-doors being open. "He may come at any moment," she was thinking. "Suppose it should be now!")

"Wise," Lady Janet replied to her "Cynical." "You don't know men as I do."

"I see something of them," Ella replied. "I have opportunities."

"I suppose so," said Lady Janet ironically. "The well-dressed on their best behaviour. And all of one kind."

Mr. Strangworth's accusation of a limited experience had taken Ella by surprise and she had had no answer ready for him, but now she was prepared: "Socially I should say that I have a pretty mixed diet. You forget all the people I see on business. It is not only on Wednesday afternoons that I am here."

"One requires a mixed diet socially in order to remain healthy-minded," Lady Janet said thoughtfully. "I know. For my own social diet is not healthily diversified."

"Too much of the idle rich," Ella suggested, smiling.

"Oh, all rich people are not idle, nor are all idlers rich people," Lady Janet rejoined impartially. "It is breadth of outlook and object that diversifies mankind, and my set is narrowed by prejudice and restricted by precedent, the arch enemies of growth. Human nature restricted by stereotyped rules becomes root-bound, like a plant that has outgrown its flower-pot."

"Thy words are sweeter than aught else but his
Whose echoes they are"—

Ella said softly. "Mr. Strangworth——"

"The unattainable," sighed Lady Janet.

"But would you?" Ella ventured in surprise.

"Oh, wouldn't I? Wouldn't you?"

"I haven't thought of him from that point of view."

"I fancy you don't think of any man from that point of view."

Lady Janet looked at her shrewdly, but Ella's face told her nothing, and she made no reply. She was looking out anxiously across the room, fearing that Melton might come now, when their first meeting would be under observation.

"One expands in Gregor Strangworth's atmosphere," Lady Janet harked back, caressing the subject.

"What is this thing you call atmosphere, and talk so much about?" Ella asked.

"Modern psychologists say, and I believe it, that we each have an atmosphere peculiar to ourselves, the creation of our thoughts," Lady Janet answered, "and strong or feeble, according to our characters. The stronger atmospheres make themselves felt decidedly. When they are friendly they put us at our ease; but if they are antagonistic they repel us."

"But how dreadful!" said Ella. "For the worst people may be friendly."

"I meant friendly in the sense of congenial. An atmosphere created by bad thoughts is not congenial to pure-minded people."

"I should think manner determines our attitude towards each other more than anything," was Ella's opinion.

"Manners may be deceptive."

"But if good manners are not the outcome of good feeling, it soon shows."

"Wise child!"

"I should think the various atmospheres in a crowd must neutralise each other."

"A crowd has its collective atmosphere. People are seldom altogether themselves in a crowd. The confusion of thought, the mixture of wrong thinking and of right is too disturbing to allow of anything but superficial impressions. It is in small companies, or when we are alone together, that atmosphere tells best. Then there are surprises for us! The man you couldn't bear in a crowd because he was rasped himself, becomes normal again *tête-à-tête,* and you find him congenial."

"I should think his taking the trouble to be agreeable accounted for the difference."

"Unbeliever!"

"What you call atmosphere I should call personality," said Ella.

"Personality claims our attention," Lady Janet argued, "but it does not account for our feelings. . . . Isn't that my precious nephew in the hall?" she broke off. Her tone was not complimentary.

She referred to Jaspar Brastaby, who was just then shedding his greatcoat into Beveridge's hands in the hall, Pecky Tim looking on expectantly, like a bull terrier when bones are about. Brastaby shied his hat at him.

"He looks more like your uncle than your nephew," said Ella.

"Nephew's bad enough," Lady Janet rejoined.

"That doesn't sound friendly," Ella remarked for something to say. She was thinking of Melton.

"Friendly? H'm!" Lady Janet hesitated, looked at her, then said indifferently: "Does Jaspar inspire you with friendly feelings?"

Ella slightly shrugged her shoulders. "He's pleasant," she said, "and tactful."

"Tactful, yes. That's one objection to him. I don't know how tactfulness affects you, but when I perceive that I am being tactfully dealt with, I am thrown into opposition at once. Pleasant, tactful—not to say tricky."

"I dare say he means well."

"He may," Lady Janet allowed. "But he is a man of odd impulses. Let no such man be trusted."

Ella did not perceive that she was being warned. "I rather like him," she answered absently.

"You are a joy to me," said Lady Janet. "It is refreshing to meet a woman who doesn't adore him. But, there! God made him a man!"

"Aren't you rather hard on men?" Ella asked.

"No, not hard. I'm just to them. I like them, but I don't believe in them."

"What do you believe in?"

"I believe in the multiplication table. That is the only thing on which no doubt can be cast."

"But you can err in your use of it."

"Not if you've mastered it. Once you have, you use it mechanically. If you would know where you are with a man, you must reckon him up; so many points to the good, so many to the bad; then draw your conclusion. Until you know what a man is, don't pin your faith to anything he says. Men are hucksters all in their dealings with women. They exploit their mother's love, their sister's affection, their wife's devotion, and their daughter's faith—and handle their mistresses for their own purposes, sickeningly. Except in rare instances, they expect their chivalry to yield cent per cent profits. And what is it after all, this precious chivalry? Pretty little attentions! Require some substantial benefit of them, and you are up against business, which they tell you *is* business. Not seriously is the only happy way for a woman to take men."

"You are bitter."

"Not in the least. I feel no more bitterness towards men for being what they are than I feel towards the weather when it isn't all I could wish."

"At all events they stand by each other, which is more than women do. You may know where you are with men, but never with women."

"How did you arrive at that?"

"Oh, I feel——"

For the first time she detected something offensive in his manner, but she resisted the impression, as an unfair effect of Lady Janet's suggestion.

CHAPTER III

DAYS OF DOUBT AND DREAD

1

A HORRIBLE monotony of uncertainty succeeded the announcement of Melton's return. The reasons Ella had at first thought of to account for his non-appearance soon ceased to satisfy her, and she began to ask herself, was it possible that his tour round the world had answered its purpose and cured him of his infatuation? That this might be the case had not hitherto occurred to her except as one of those passing thoughts which are instantly dismissed to the limbo of things impossible.

But supposing he had changed, what should she do? Must she marry someone else? Other men of means and position were offering themselves for her acceptance; men she liked well enough. And there was always Col Drindon. It is significant that she considered him apart from the other men, whom she "liked well enough." He was, in fact, the only one whose worth for her purpose she seriously weighed. There had been moments when her heart went out to Col, and she wavered. Propinquity she supposed to account for this lapse and to excuse it. "At short distances the senses are despotic." Love is a flame that must be fed or it expires, and it is only at first that absence makes the heart grow fonder. For two long years she had had no fuel for her love, not a word, not a sign. But neither had Melton presumably. This was another disquieting thought when she came to reflect upon it, a two-edged sword cutting at his constancy as well as at her own. She had called in recollection to combat the effect of separation in her own case. But had he? His life could have been no fuller of distraction than hers had been since they parted, yet, with the help of recollection, the flame in her had survived. It had burnt low, though; she was forced to acknowledge that. His return had only just been in time to save it. But surely she loved

him; otherwise, merely to have him within reach again would not have been so disturbing.

This conclusion, however, settled nothing. Oh, if he would but come! If he would but come! Unless they met she could arrive at no decision.

The Duke was her one solace at this time. She was sure of him at all events, and the hours she spent in his company were hours of ease to her mind. She did not perceive that he was taking special care that this should be so. But that she was not in her normal state of serenity had not escaped him. He detected little unaccustomed signs of disturbance; an aggressiveness, for one thing, which was not natural to her. The strength of her attack was not wont to be discounted by harsh-voiced insistence. Gentleness veiled her tenacity, and it was habitually by calm intensity, by quiet determination that she carried her point. Now she was apt to show irritation when opposed. And her habit of speaking of her enterprise in terms of war, which Mr. Strangworth had deprecated, became more pronounced. She had always thought of her project as carrying the war into the enemy's country, and was chronically by way of arming herself for the fray. The books she had collected on every sort of social grievance, so as to have the facts at her finger-ends, had tended to develop the combative side of her nature. She made it pretty plain to the Duke that it would have been a relief to her now to have been able to attack with all arms the evils that made her blood boil; but why, he asked himself, this unwonted impatience, this sudden need of relief? Hitherto she had been placidly content to make use of him. He had supposed that he had her full confidence on every vital subject, they had been in such perfect accord. Her point of view had been his, more or less, in an ineffectual sort of way, until she clarified his ideas and wrought his nebulous projects into a concrete plan of action. He had done his best on his own estates, but had stopped there until she supplied the incentive he lacked, the faith in his own capacity, the incitement to devote his power and influence to definite, far-reaching measures of reform. And she had, moreover, by her passionate partisanship, her interest in his efforts, her delight in his successes, her pride in his courage and appreciation of his self-sacrifice, made him, after long years of depression, a happy man. She was his dearest, and he enjoyed the opprobrium he brought on himself since she interpreted it as a sign of success. He had been branded "The Ducal So-

cialist," had been grossly caricatured, had suffered virulent personal attacks from the newspapers, had offended the majority of his own caste in all countries in which aristocratic dominance still monopolised the best of everything and lorded it oppressively over the labouring masses; and had taken every injustice, taken the inevitable ridicule, slanderous abuse, lying misrepresentation, contemptuous criticism, and all the fume of little and evil minds, as a matter of course, as disagreeable things in the day's work which were to be expected, and treated, like the weather when it is bad, with a passing reference, but not allowed to interfere with anything that he had a mind to do. His delight was in the doing because it pleased her. That serenely beautiful room of hers was the home of his heart, the only real home he had. In her company his loneliness fell from him. She companioned him as never before had he been companioned. To return to her, to be gladly welcomed by her, to have won her applause, to be with her, they two together with the world shut out, that was what he lived for.

And had he only thought of himself he would have been satisfied, but into his content had come this suspicion that all was not well with her. To think of her as not happy was a bitter drop in his cup. It was a chronic grief to him that he could not endow her with all he possessed of name and position. He would have gloried to parade her before the whole world as his own. He had done what he could for her happiness by providing her with the means to carry out her own ideas, but the position was exposed, was dangerous even, and he could never be sure that such precautions as he was able to take to protect her, were sufficient. He had done all he could to smooth the way for her, too, in every particular he could think of, by every means at his command. Had he failed? Was there something really wrong?

2

With these questions in his mind, the Duke found himself at the Corner House one night discussing Intensive Culture, Adnam's Orchard, and the scarcity of agricultural labourers. Ella was more obviously nervous and restless than he had ever known her, and he had introduced a subject which never failed to rouse her, partly to distract her, and partly in the hope that she might indirectly give him a clue to the cause of her

disquietude. In answer to his usual careful inquiry she had declared that she was "quite well," "quite happy," and "had everything she wanted." "Then what is the matter?" it had been on the tip of his tongue to ask, but he knew that she would answer "nothing," and the result would be to put her on her guard against inadvertently betraying what she was evidently determined to conceal. "It is the fault of the landowners that the countryside is deserted," Ella maintained. "Men cannot live on the land who have no houses to live in, and they cannot care for the land if they have no stake on it, and not even a living wage."

"The landowners are poverty-stricken too, half of them——"

"Because they are too lazy to learn their own business, and develop the land," she caught him up. "Because they have wheat on the brain, and let the fields lie idle which could be producing a dozen other profitable crops, while they grumble at the fall in price which gives the poor man his loaf."

"Something in that," said the Duke; "but it doesn't apply to all of us."

"Not to you, I know, but think of Pointz!"

"Seraph Pratt is reforming Pointz——"

"In the interests of the owner, but how about the peasants? Is he for restoring the Commons they were robbed of?"

"'Stole the Common from the Goose'—'Hudibras,' I think——"

"And hanged and flogged and transported the goose for humbly petitioning——"

He stopped her with a gesture. "You always have that on your mind," he remonstrated.

"It stands for so much."

"Typical, eh? An exaggeration. But I confess—— Well, well!" He relapsed into thought.

"The workpeople themselves have degenerated," he recommenced. "Too keen on amusement. That is why the towns attract them. They are for shirking work and playing all the time——"

"Like their masters——"

"Example, eh? Filters through from the top. Like master, like man. Often observed it."

"Oh, how I should love to make them pay!" she burst out.

"Difficult, in any case," he said. "How would you propose to do it?"

She seized the opportunity. "Means and position are the best weapons," she replied. "If I married——"

"What! For money?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no! The man who offers need not be personally objectionable because he has great possessions."

There was a pause, during which the Duke's restless fingers sought for something to do, and found a button on the arm of his chair.

"Waiting for somebody, eh?" he asked at last, looking at the fire. "Your eye on somebody, eh?" He got this out with an effort.

Ella blushed, but was silent.

He looked at her. "Mustn't press the question, I suppose," he muttered. It was one of his audible asides.

She clasped her hands. Why not tell him? She bent forward, her lips parted to speak. Then she remembered. Melton had returned but had made no sign. She had nothing to go upon, and only that to tell which would expose her to the Duke's pity, vain hopes, resting, as he would be sure to think, on an unwarranted assumption. The impulse to confide in him was checked. Her woman's pride restrained her.

The impulse would not have escaped him had he been looking at her, but his eyes were on the fire, and he missed the clue. Fate had determined that the Duke should pay.

"You are going to make them pay, eh?" he harked back after a while, his restless fingers prodding at the button on the arm of his chair. "Your weapon wealth and position. Powerful, certainly. But suppose your man doesn't countenance your programme when you're married?"

This supposition had not occurred to Ella, and now, with a shrug, she refused to entertain it.

"You rely upon your power to mould him to your own ideas, eh?" he suggested.

"Am I not armed to the teeth with all a woman's weapons?" she answered lightly.

"Teeth good, certainly," he said with a passing smile. "Well," —he relapsed into seriousness—"suppose him complaisant, and you with money and the power of a high position at your disposal, as well as your personal attractions, which would go far towards the accomplishment of any purpose, how are you going to make them pay? Or, rather, why make them 'pay' at all? Consider, is there not a more excellent way to do good?

Has any great end of justice or mercy ever been accomplished by reprisal, the method you imply? It is not the avenger who softens the heart of man. Nobility of nature is not of the head but of the heart. The shapes into which our actions are resolved by violence are not beautiful shapes. People will never be forced to the sacrifices required of them when it comes to the more equal distribution of the good things of this world, but they may be won to contribute their share. Brute force falls daily more and more into disrepute. We begin to appreciate it for the barbarous thing it is, and already there is a better, lovelier spirit abroad, a spirit seeing all things through the medium of kindness and compassion—which even compassionates the sinner for his misfortune in that he has sinned."

"You talk like Mr. Strangworth," Ella said.

"I wish I could," he answered sincerely.

"Beautiful talk," she pursued, "but unpractical. Humanity in the mass must be whipped into shape; there is no other way. All this talk of peace and good-will makes me anticipate war."

"War—reaction," he meditated. "It may be that war will come again that men may realise it for the hideous crime it is. . . . You don't like Mr. Strangworth's talk?"

"But I like Mr. Strangworth."

The button was off the arm of his chair by this time, and the Duke, with his penknife, was carefully unpicking the stitches from the satin which covered it, taking care not to break the thread. This accomplished he threw button and satin and thread into the fire, then rose to depart.

"Will you come again soon?" she asked wistfully.

On the way home he decided that this was the clue. She was lonely.

3

It seemed to Ella in her dreams that night that the Directing Power of her destiny favoured her with a tremendous utterance for her guidance. She awoke with the words on her lips: "A watched pot never boils."

As she roused herself she smiled at the awe inspired by the pronouncement as it came to her in her sleep; but the homely proverb stayed with her, forced itself upon her attention, suggested itself for application. She had feared to leave the house since Melton's return lest he should come in her absence; surely

that was watching the pot! And it was foolish, too; wearing to herself, and unnecessary. For if he meant to see her, missing her at the first attempt would only make him the keener. She felt that she had been wasting both herself and her time. A watched pot never boils. She would cast off anxiety, empty her mind of expectation, follow her usual pursuits, and let happen what might. But her excitement did not subside all at once. Passivity would have rested and strengthened her, but she had not trained herself to it. Her effort in times of trial was always to be up and doing, and now she was for active exercise. After work that day she took her revolver, and drove out to Strangworth Park, to find a target among the trees. Her desire for outdoor exercise had been immediately gratified through Mr. Bosc, who had been instructed to provide her with the means, whatever pursuit she chose; and shooting was now one of her accomplishments.

On her way through the streets she fell in with another carriage. The throng of vehicles made their progress slow. Sometimes in a block they were abreast of each other, sometimes Ella's carriage was in front, sometimes behind. She was aware of the solitary occupant of the other carriage, aware of her auburn hair, brightly burnished and elaborately dressed; aware of her striking costume, which advertised its costliness as surely as the still more costly *simplicité élégante* which Ella affected, warded off all vulgar suggestion of price. The carriage also was showy and offensive to Ella's taste. She noticed these things at first rather than their owner, though presently, when her own carriage had dropped behind, she became aware of her as a girl, younger than herself; aware of her perfect profile, cold-white and rigid, turned towards the pavement, and of her eye on the passers-by, a steadily watchful eye, but neither anxious nor impatient. Just so a well-fed beast of prey, in no hurry for a victim, is kept by habit always on the alert.

Ella, glancing in the same direction, saw Lord Terry de Beach hanging on his Julius's arm. As they approached he openly winked one wicked old eye at the occupant of the carriage in front. Mr. Harkles also signalled friendly recognition, but more discreetly. The next moment both gentlemen were doffing their hats respectfully to Ella herself. Ella looked at the girl involuntarily, expecting a show of resentment. She was smiling slightly. It was inconceivable to Ella that she should not have thought herself insulted.

Next of her acquaintances in the crowd Ella saw Col Drindon and Jaspar Brastaby approaching together. Col had seen her before she saw him. His fair face flushed. He had no eyes for anyone else.

Brastaby saw the occupant of the carriage in front first. He smiled and nodded to her familiarly and waved his stick. Then, recognising Ella, he repeated the boisterous performance. She stared at him, unable to believe that such a salute was intended for her. He mistook her petrifaction for a deliberate snub, and vowed in his heart that pride should have a fall. There was no opportunity of speaking, as another carriage was between hers and the curb, and the whole mass moved on at the moment—only to be pulled up again, however, a stone's-throw further on.

Again the two carriages were abreast, and this time her neighbour turned and looked her full in the face. Simultaneously each uttered an exclamation.

"Emily Ryecote!" Ella just breathed.

"Ella Banks!" the other said loudly. She had the harsh, metallic ring in her voice which comes when the heart hardens and the feelings are embittered. She was the daughter of an old and respected retainer on the Castlefield Saye estate, a village beauty, who had mysteriously disappeared from her home three years before, in company, it was suspected, with Algernon Appleton Pointz. She and Ella had grown up in the same neighbourhood and had known each other well.

Leaning over to Ella to make herself heard above the roar of the street, she said jeeringly, "So that's you, is it! We're in the same way of business again, though this is better than lace. I've dropped that pretence. I'm genuine of my kind. You're a sham. And I've done well for myself, but not as well as you. Nothing pays like hypocrisy!" She laughed mirthlessly. "But, I say, let's be friends again. It's a bit lonesome never seeing a soul one knows. Come and have tea——"

Ella's horses sprang forward with a jerk. Her coachman, escaping from the block, made for a side-street, and she was whirled away.

For a little she was too stunned to think. The harsh voice sounded in her ears, the hard, beautiful white face, refined in outline, but rendered soulless by the cruel process which had wiped out its once delicately rose-tinted colouring and girlish sweetness, haunted her mind's eye, clean-cut as a cameo against

a background of darkness. The meaning of its empty rigidity, blank of expression save for the bright animal eyes, watchful of danger, alert for prey; and the meaning of that speech, though the words escaped her, she was conscious of. Depravity!

Depravity in what was to her its most abhorrent form.

Ella had come to London ignorant of that side of life, but Mrs. Bosc, as a duty, had enlightened her. Mrs. Bosc had common sense. She understood the danger of ignorance, the defencelessness of a girl who has not been put on her guard, and had done her best to arm Ella with such knowledge as she herself possessed. It was limited. Like our mothers (bless them) she failed in fairness when it came to apportioning the guilt. She was not to be taken in by the modernist school, which, under the guise of a new sort of wealth, labours to foist moral bankruptcy on the world in tirades against sexual restraint. Right and wrong were not terms to her which could be interchanged to suit anybody's convenience. But she would have sat out the "Second Mrs. Tanqueray" without being struck by the fact that the brutalisation of the woman must have been the work of the men with whom she associated, men who passed in society for men of refinement and claimed to be gentlemen.

She knew, of course, that there were men who did unspeakable things, but she held that decent men ("Men always know all about each other, my dear") were always on guard to protect decent women from contact with such monsters. "That is chivalry, my dear, and all good men are chivalrous." Moreover, she believed that doers of the unspeakable must be branded in some sort, visibly; that monsters must look like monsters, and so be easy to avoid.

This want of balance in her teaching had had the inevitable result in Ella's case. She passed over the sins of men as venial, but the sins of women she felt to be heinous.

This was the first time she had encountered one of "those women," and she had recoiled from her, sickened.

When she became conscious of her surroundings again the carriage was passing through a low neighbourhood. The streets were crowded as if the people lived in them rather than in the wretched houses, whose torn blinds hanging askew, scraps of dirty lace curtains, broken panes of glass stuffed with bundles of rags, grimy walls, and sun-blistered, rotting window-frames and doors, justified the exodus when the freedom of the open

air was compared to what might be expected in the way of discomfort within. The human flotsam for whatever reason jettisoned from respectable quarters would not have been repulsive for the most part to a sympathetic observer, the evidence of misfortune was so much clearer than the evidence of depravity. The men, lounging about, with shoulders up, heads down, and hands deep in their pockets, had a hang-dog air, but their faces were seldom bad. Utter dejection and hopelessness was what their attitude, rightly understood, expressed. A good meal and a chance would have squared many a one of them and roused him from his depression, to set his shoulder to the wheel with a will.

The frowsy women standing in the doorways against a background of blackened passages and rickety perpendicular staircases were more alive than the men and less discouraged. Women are not so easily beaten by misfortune as men are; they resist to the last gasp. The men were as silent shadows in these streets, but the women made themselves heard. Their shrill voices, the energy of their occasional gestures, their loud complaints and threats of what they'd a mind to do, bespoke their vitality triumphant, their wills unsubdued. And the curling-pins in their hair were proof that they had not abandoned hope.

The endurance of the children was also wonderful. Ill-clad, half-starved, sickly, still they shouted and laughed, played in the gutter, squabbled and fought—fought for their lives after their kind. The children of the slums are of their mothers' breed, and their mothers are heroic.

Ella had often passed that way before, but her considerate coachman had always hitherto urged the horses through at the top of their speed that she might not have time to be shocked by sights and sounds which no beautiful lady should see or hear. But to-day the street was blocked by an accident ahead. A little child had been run over by a dray, and Ella's carriage was caught and stopped in the crowd which had collected.

She was roused by a roar of voices and found herself a centre of attraction. Men and women surrounded her carriage and stared at her, the women with lively interest, the men, too apathetic to be appreciative, sourly at first, but with gradually clearing countenances, their latent manhood asserting itself in the sunshine of her beauty.

There was no show of ill-will.

"Is anything the matter?" Ella inquired of a woman who was holding on to the door of the carriage.

"Matter enough, lidy, a pore little child killed—crushed cruel, they si. I couldn't look meself." She shivered and wiped her eyes with her dirty apron.

"Oh, how dreadful!" Ella exclaimed. "Can I do anything? Are you it's—are you any relation?"

"Noa. That's it's mother screechin'. . . . What can you do? What can any of us do? . . . There's the perlice. They're bringin' of the body this wy."

"Oh, don't let me see!" Ella cried, covering her face with her hands.

"She ain't used to this sort of thing," a slatternly-looking woman observed compassionately. "I guess her childer don't get run over in the gutter! They'll be kep' in cotton-wool all right in a fine nursery full of tyes, bless 'em!" The tone was congratulatory, and she smiled, the mother in her rejoicing at the thought of happy children, well cared for.

"Eh! It's well to be rich." The speaker sighed.

Ella looked up. "Oh, if I could do something!" she exclaimed, wringing her hands. "If only I could do something!"

The woman repeated the hopeless question. "What can ye do, lidy? What can anybody do? Of course, there's money."

Ella caught at the suggestion. "Money, yes. I'll see——" she was beginning, but her mettlesome horses had grown restive and began to plunge. "Oh, take care!" she broke off, half rising from her seat, in terror lest someone should be hurt.

A giant policeman approached, and the harsh voice of authority made itself heard: "'Ere now, you there! Wot y' doin'? Move on, will yer! Let the lidy pass."

The crowd separated. Ella was jerked back onto her seat, and was out of earshot before she had recovered herself. She called to her coachman to stop, but he disregarded the order. He knew his business as a man and a coachman, which females didn't seem to. His duty was to get his lidy safe out of that rabble, and get her out he did in spite of herself.

Ella caught at the strap and closed her eyes, but only to see the more clearly. Vivid impressions of the scene had imprinted themselves on her mind; the inward eye opened on these when the outward ones were shut. She saw the potential beauty under the dirt on the faces of little children, faces that should have been round and rosy but were sharpened by want—as were

their wits—and horribly matured by suffering. She saw the sweetness pathetically surviving in the smile of the prematurely aged and haggard young woman whose heart was big enough to be gladdened by the thought of children tenderly cared for as her own would never be. She saw men who should have been in the prime of life, but were already decrepit and disfigured, all their strength and comeliness sapped by hardship and privation. Children and all, they looked like patients convalescent from serious illnesses, sickly still, and with the imprint of pain still lingering on their bloodless faces. And the dwellings into which they were crammed, the masses of them seething like maggots in a carcase! Not for want of space. Rows of roomy houses, standing empty, disgraced the neighbourhood; their mud-bespattered walls, the shutters on the lower windows hanging from their hinges, and every broken pane of glass adding to the general appearance of neglect a repulsive detail, as of a disease which shows itself in sores. Where were the owners and what were they thinking of? What was the community at large thinking of, and where were its powers that such a state of things should be tolerated in the richest city in the world! Oh, of a truth—

It is our will
Which thus enchains us to permitted ill.

Ella knew how little of the misery of the poor was deserved, how much of it was due to the injustice, rapacity, and hard-heartedness of the rich. She clenched her hands and called down vengeance on their heads. All that Emily Ryecote stood for circled among her scattered impressions, vividly, like a serpent of fire in a forest of pine trees. And this was the City Joyous of her dreams, this sink of corruption! No wonder that for her the bells had ceased to chime jubilantly. Might they toll and toll and toll, till the poor had ceased to suffer, and the rich had ceased to sin!

4

A change of posture not unfrequently produces a change of mind. When contemplation is interrupted by action the inward eye closes and the outward eye opens and is reattached to the machinery of thought. The act of alighting from her carriage

when it stopped at the gates of Strangworth Park, combined with the everyday necessity of giving her coachman his orders, effectually dissipated the sorrowful bird's-eye view of the world of suffering with which Ella had been preoccupied, and re-adjusted her outlook. The immediate business of life claimed her attention, and the outwardly visible overlaid the inwardly apprehended.

She sent her carriage to put up at the Bosquet, where she intended to dine, and struck into a bridle-path which led across the Park to a wood on an eminence behind the house.

The wintry afternoon was bright and clear. There was an exhilarating touch of frost in the air and its sweetness was grateful to her senses. She inhaled deep draughts of it, and soon her blood, refreshed, was coursing merrily through her veins. The physical sense of well-being eased her mind. In and out among the trees she sped buoyantly, glorying in her youth and health and strength, not thinking at all.

She carried her revolver under her coat in a case slung from a girdle round her waist, and as she went she took it out and fingered it. It was one the Duke had given her, and not a toy. She would have nothing to do with toys for any practical purpose, and had insisted on his changing a weapon of more beauty than use, which he had offered her first, for this murderous Colt.

As she neared the wood a rabbit crossed her path. Mechanically she aimed at it and fired. The pretty creature rolled over and writhed upon the ground. Ella fled precipitately, the gratification of a good hit spoilt by the cruel consequence.

The target for which she was making was an old oak blasted by lightning. It stood as though placed for the purpose, facing west at the end of a level clearing near the summit of the hill. All around was a guard of forest trees, their bare, grey branches extended to each other as though they clasped hands to encircle her. The low sun crimsoned the western sky, and, etched on this luminous background, the trees stood out clearly defined, from giant bole to tiniest twig, an ancient people that had kept loyal watch and ward on the place for hundreds of years. Even their charred comrade, his long limbs stripped by the lightning blast and livid, stayed, valiantly upright and distinct from the rank and file, like some hoary, veteran commander still at his post, resisting the onslaughts of tempest and time to the last.

Ella drew a circle on his trunk with a piece of chalk, set a white dot in the centre, took up her position, and fired. Her first two shots hit outside the circle, the next two were well within, the next went wide. She loaded again, frowned determination, fired, and the white dot disappeared. A bull's-eye! She ran forward to make sure of it.

A heavy step crunched the fallen twigs under the trees near by, a rough voice challenged her: "'Ere, I say, you done this! What d'ye mean?"

Ella looked over her shoulder. It was a young keeper in new fustian. He held out a dead rabbit and glared at her.

"Take that horrid thing *away!*" she exclaimed, and with her back to him, set a dot down emphatically in the centre of a new circle on the tree.

"Now look 'ere—mistress—you're tress-passin'," he said, coming up to her, "an' wot's worse, you bin' poachin'. Look at this!" He flourished the gory rabbit at her. "An' look at that there pistol in yer 'and. You done it, so you needn't deny it."

The sight of blood sickened and exasperated Ella. She turned on him. "Take that horrid thing *away,*" she repeated imperiously. "Didn't you hear what I *said?*"

He saw her fully now. They were face to face, a handsome pair, he, tall and straight, with clear, dark skin and carmine-mantled cheeks, she the Winged Victory on the war-path.

Involuntarily, he touched his cap, and hid the rabbit behind him.

Ella smiled. "You must be a new broom," she said.

Her smile troubled him. He looked away, and kept his eyes averted—an acknowledgment of weakness. But duty is duty, especially when you are a new broom, and "Britons never, never" —whatever the power confronting them. "Beg pardon, lady," he said doggedly, "but you done this."

Again he confronted her with the evidence of her crime, and, again sickened and exasperated, she stamped her foot. "Put the horrid thing away," she cried. "Of course I shot it. I didn't mean to. I only fired at it."

But he held on, though apologetically. "Mr. Strangworth's got to see you and this 'ere rabbit, lady, it can't be 'elped," he said.

She saw herself before Mr. Strangworth, accused of poaching, and turned away to hide her amusement. There was fun in the prospect. She hung her head deceitfully, affecting to resign

herself. "I suppose you must take me," she said. "Go on. I'll follow you."

"Mr. Strangworth's a good sort, 'e'll only jaw you a bit," he assured her.

On their way to the house it occurred to her that Mr. Strangworth might not take a humorous view of her arrest, and it would be no joke to this conscientious young man if his officiousness cost him his place. It was a pity, but—

Mr. Strangworth was warming his back at the fire in the hall when they were shown in. He came forward with both hands gladly extended. "Why, Ella, my dear! Come for tea? I'm the happiest man in the world! . . . What d'ye want?"

This to his trusty retainer, who stood dumbfounded.

"He's carrying a rabbit I shot," she said. "Can he take it away? I can't bear dead things."

At a nod from Mr. Strangworth the keeper disappeared with the rabbit and a grateful heart.

"So you shot a rabbit though you can't bear dead things," Mr. Strangworth commented.

"It bounded out and I just fired," Ella said. "You know how one does. I didn't mean to kill it. I shouldn't have thought I could."

"I know. Oh, Ella!" His countenance clouded. "Beware of impulse! Don't shoot, actually or figuratively, ever, at anything, without stopping to think. I warn you. And I can tell you it is a sorrowful thing to have to regret it, when we would not be warned. . . . But come to the fire! I am delighted to see you!"

He took her hands again in a warm grasp. She thought he was going to kiss her, and she would not have objected any more than she objected to the Duke's kisses, or Mrs. Bosc's. Affection craves for affection, and such kisses were to her a natural demonstration, but Mr. Strangworth stopped short of it. He would as soon have thought of kissing the Sistine Madonna in the flesh. Not that he esteemed Ella on such a height, but neither did he regard her with the eye of the flesh alone. The greater includes the lesser, and Mr. Strangworth was too exquisite a connoisseur to be satisfied with a single note when there was a whole emotional gamut to be felt. The fall of Pygmalion from the spiritual ecstasy which had wrought the marble to perfection, to the lustful desire to have immortal beauty converted into perishable flesh and blood, for the gratifi-

cation of his senses, was not incomprehensible to Mr. Strangworth, nor was it revolting. It was simply stupid. It was sacrificing boundless delight that never stales for a momentary thrill. To realise the awful in the beautiful, the claim to be reverenced as sacred; to have the senses of the lower nature dominated and their function held in suspense by the consummate response of the spirit, is to experience the undiluted pleasure that is divine. Mr. Strangworth was one of those who have it in them to attain to this supreme gratification, and he had laboured to develop the power in himself. Hence, even intellectual beauty, if it were unaccompanied by at least potential spiritual grace, had no charm for him. Without this jewel it was an empty casket, to be admired perhaps for the cunning of its workmanship, but of small account compared to the worth of the treasure it should have contained.

Ella supposed him unaffected by her beauty. He paid her none of the compliments that were wont to be showered upon her. But, all the same, from the crowning glory of her shining dusky hair to the perfection of her high-arched, slender foot he admired her, admired her as the last wonder of Divine creation because of the soul he discerned in her. He was aware of her attitude towards the spiritual side of her nature, of her suspicion of its manifestations, her unavailing efforts wholly to suppress them; and, because her efforts were unavailing, because again and again the higher power had succeeded in forcing her intellect out of action, he knew that there was hope for her, foresaw that in the end the higher power would prevail, the narrow outlook of her mind would be enlarged, the intellect on which she relied overruled.

To him she was so evidently a chosen vessel! He held that she could not have been made as she was with any other intention. And it is by suffering that such enlargement of the outlook, such overruling of mortal by spiritual apprehension is accomplished. How would the pain be inflicted? Was she doomed to sin? There was no pettiness in her. She would be the sort of splendid sinner who makes a splendid saint. But need she be plunged in the mire? There were other forms of humiliation which would destroy the pride that was holding her back. She might be caught in the grip of the social system, the thrall of circumstance, enslaved by events prepared for the purpose through the agency of mankind in their conduct of life before she was born. Gregor Strangworth would not

have saved her the pain if he could, it was necessary. But he prayed that, when the trial came upon her, he might be privileged to support her as a parent supports a child under the knife, privileged to soothe the cruel after-pangs of the life-saving operation, privileged to help in the completion of the cure. To help any human being to develop the best that is in him is high emprise for a man; and to help the Winged Victory!—Mr. Strangworth's heart swelled—and as suddenly contracted. The Winged Victory was defaced, sorrowful omen. Yet she remained a joy forever—the cloud lifted. He foresaw a Winged Victory of the triumphant spirit which neither time nor man (otherwise the devil) can corrupt.

He had been thinking of Ella in this strain just before she arrived, and it was an inexpressible relief to him to see her unblighted, happy, confident, a dawning smile on her lips, sure of him and of herself, unsuspicious and unafraid as a well-guarded child that has never known, and is not likely to know, anything but kindness. The contrast she presented to the picture he had had in his mind was like the awakening from a dream of disaster to find the sun shining and all well.

Instantly he was on the alert to serve her, only too glad of the immediate opportunity. The instinct in such a man is ineradicable. The woman appeals to him when there is something to be done for her, as the child appeals to the woman, and the good heart expands in the doing.

She had never seen him so fussy before, fussily concerned for her comfort, and didactically explicit, assigning a reason for every suggestion. She must sit a little more to one side of the hearth, the fire was fierce and would scorch her face. Three times he rang and had a confab apart with Appledore, about tea. He had lost faith in Appledore—couldn't believe that he was capable of getting the right kind of tea for the occasion, if he didn't see to every detail himself.

Then Ella must take off her coat as well as her furs. The house was central heated—not a chill in it. No stuffiness either. Fresh air, that was the secret, drawn from outside by a great furnace in the cellar and delivered warm all over the house through little grids in the floor, like that one over there. Capital system, only one drawback, it dried the air rather, but that defect was easily remedied by standing water about. That tank of creatures was for the purpose, use and ornament. And he liked the creatures. Had she ever seen a hippocampus? Funny

fellow, wasn't he? So sedate! . . . It was a great mistake to suppose you'd catch cold if you went warm out of the house. Go out warm and you are able to resist the cold. If you go out perishing, your vitality is at a low ebb, and you can't resist. English people are idiotic on the subject of heating their houses, Americans are insane. We freeze and they suffocate. An equable temperature, not hot, just comfortably warm, is the thing. The English get their chills passing from one room to another, from the fireplace to the other side of a room even, hence the appalling prevalence of bronchial and pulmonary complaints. He gave her his word he'd suffered more during a week-end in a palace than he had ever suffered in his own house in his whole life.

Ella stopped the flow by observing that he had fires.

"Oh, wood fires, just for the look of the thing. I love the blaze and the crackle and the scent, don't you?"

"Very much."

She smiled up at him, and he heaped more logs on in haste, talking all the time. She had only to listen and smile. But always when she smiled he did something energetic—moved a chair, took a turn about the room, sat down and jumped up again.

The comfort of the great hall, nothing in it either new or old and everything appropriate, the harmony of it all, was tranquillising. She settled by the fire in luxurious content, the content of the warmly welcomed, who are made to feel that the longer they tarry the greater pleasure they give. It seemed to her that the very portraits on the walls, beautiful women and gallant gentlemen, welcomed her with friendly complaisance. But unlike the Brabant folk, they had nothing to say to her.

"What fine faces!" she said.

He glanced at the pictures. "Before I had the house," he answered, "for many generations it was the home of good men and noble women. Where good men are noble women abound."

She noticed his modest care to exclude himself from this eulogium. "How do you keep noble women out now then?" she asked. "With a stick?"

He lost countenance and turned away.

They had tea by the light of the blazing logs, he talking while she satisfied a healthy appetite, sharpened by fresh air and exercise.

Suddenly she remembered her adventure, the accident and

the poor people, and the annoying conspiracy between her coachman and the policeman, which prevented her doing anything.

"I was whirled away against my will," she said.

"Ah!" he ejaculated. "Powerless in the grip of the social system." His late forebodings revived with the words.

"The social system is full of monstrous injustices," she said.

"True," he replied. "There are two sides to it: the good and the bad. The evil and the good in it are mixed, inextricably mixed; hence all the confusion."

"I won't be thwarted by the social system!" she exclaimed petulantly.

"It was protecting you on this occasion," he said. "I've no doubt the men were quite right to get you out of the crowd. What could you have done at the time? Scattered money, for which the people would have fought, and your horses would have taken fright in the scrimmage. You might have been maimed for life yourself and caused others to be maimed, and you would certainly, from every point of view, have done more harm than good. Where things are radically wrong it is the root of the evil that must be attacked. I am not against palliatives in cases of extreme suffering, but they should be administered by experts who understand the disease, and only as temporary measures. Causes are the things to attack, not effects."

"The Duke says——" she was beginning, but a sudden quickening of Mr. Strangworth's attention put her on her guard. She understood that the Duke was obliged to show his interest in her clandestinely because of the Duchess's dislike of her. She knew that if it got to the Duchess's ears that they were intimate, the Duke would have his leave stopped by fair means or foul. The Duchess had countenanced her publicly to please Ursula Pratt, she supposed. The Duchess's subsequent neglect would have wrecked her had there been no one else to pull the wires in her favour, and there was no one else but the Duke himself. Therefore it was to him alone that her gratitude was due. She owed loyal obedience to his least wish, and obviously it was his wish not to have his visits talked about. She compressed her lips, angry with herself for having inadvertently mentioned him at all.

"The Duke says?" Mr. Strangworth encouraged her to continue.

"You read his speeches?" she parried.

Mr. Strangworth respected her reticence. He had only wished to get at her feeling for the Duke, as a guide, in view of possible future contingencies. He knew more of the Duke's feeling for her than she did. It was to Strangworth House that the Duke had ridden out in his sore perplexity that dark night when the weight of his trouble was greater than he could bear alone.

"Oh, yes, of course," he said. "I read his speeches. He has my sympathy. As you were saying, the social system is full of monstrous injustices."

"They make me rage," she exclaimed. "That slum in 'the richest city in the world'!"

He made a note in his pocket-book. "Don't distress yourself any more about that slum," he said. "The good side of the Social System shall be brought to bear upon it."

"And the other side made to pay," she bargained passionately.

"There! There!" he said soothingly. "Mustn't let angry passions rise. Vengeance is out of date, and the avenger only gets himself into trouble. Dr. Johnson said he liked a good hater. I don't think a stupider thing was ever said by an eminent man, and a great many stupid things have been said by eminent men. For what is the philosophy of hate? Hate is a cruel passion that contracts the heart and corrodes the soul. It may strike its object, but inevitably hate recoils upon the hater—somehow—disastrously. Don't hate the maimed souls, pity them. Love. Many a soul would not have been maimed if its due meed of love had been bestowed upon it; and many a soul would not have maimed itself if the heart had been helping the head to think. Love your way to your end whatever it be. Only love is always beneficent."

She had sat with her eyes on the fire listening resignedly, like a child to a distasteful lesson; and when he stopped she looked at him, brightening, like a child who hopes that the lesson is over. The analogy drew both a smile and a sigh from Mr. Strangworth.

Axioms have to be insisted upon, for there is nothing that loses the savour of its sense more surely than the moral obvious. Hardy perennials planted and forgotten, survive our neglect, and come up again in due season; and so also do those hardy perennials of condensed wisdom dubbed "copybook maxims." Deep-rooted in the mind, they are lost sight of and forgotten, or

only remembered to be despised as platitudes; but a time comes when they present themselves for reconsideration, and flower anew with meaning—only, unfortunately, the wisdom which would have saved the situation is not usually recognised until it is too late to apply it. *Honesty is the best policy* must have come home to roost in the mind of many a prisoner in the dock.

Mr. Strangworth was for insisting, and he had taken advantage of this rare opportunity. The lustre of gems may be dimmed by use, but their value is not diminished. Polish them, reset them, show them in the right light, and their beauty is again made manifest, their worth apprehended; and it is the same with aphorisms, those gems of experience so often disregarded because they are always in evidence. In his great concern for her, Mr. Strangworth, ever since he knew her, had patiently laboured to plant the hardy perennial in her mind, to display the worth and beauty of the slighted gem. The result was discouraging. She saw no possibility of applying his doctrine of love to the practical conduct of life in the round, therefore she was impatient of it. She held that worldly ends can best be accomplished by worldly means, and saw life as a battle to be fought, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

But now, when he smiled and sighed, her conscience smote her. He was so kind and she so unresponsive. She must say something, but what could she say? Her eyes lighted on the family portraits.

"'Good men and noble women,'" she harked back. "I call noble a Sunday word. I mean one not in everyday use. A word kept for best occasions."

"Sunday words, Sunday clothes—best clothes, only brought out on Sunday occasions. I see. The comparison is suggestive."

Ella felt herself reproached. She had disappointed him. Ordinarily he would have expanded the suggestion; now he rose and wandered aimlessly about the hall. The courtesy of his reply showed her where she had been wanting. It was a breach of good manners to have passed over all that he had said without acknowledgment of any kind, and it was ungrateful too. His concern for her welfare was purely disinterested; that fact she should have appreciated at all events. She had met with little enough pure disinterestedness. Oh, she had been remiss! How could she make amends? She might show him that she had at least understood what he meant by loving our way to our ends.

She had heard how he had dealt with the youngsters at the Land and Leisure Club who had despitefully used him, and won their regard, besides restoring order and saving the dignity of the Club, which would have suffered had the scandal of their conduct been made public. Surely a case in point. And, of course, there were occasions when sentimentality might be made to serve by a man like Mr. Strangworth. Exceptional people can use exceptional expedients with impunity.

She smiled up at him when he returned to the fire, as if she were about to speak.

"What is it?" he asked downheartedly.

"I was thinking of that famous fracas, and how you dealt with the delinquents," she replied. "You practise what you preach successfully."

His countenance cleared. "You heard of that!" he exclaimed. "Young rascals! But good chaps, too, most of them! I commandeered the lot to dinner here one night. It was a most interesting experiment." He laughed silently. "They would come and dine every night if I would excuse them the chapel. I respect those who stay away on that account. They're not hypocrites at all events. There's always good in the man or woman who's sincerely anything. And some of them do come—ask to come—because of the chapel. Some of them in spite of it."

"Col Drindon, of course, because of it," she said.

He nodded.

"Mr. Harkles in spite of——?"

"He would. But I leave him to Lord Terry de Beach," and again he laughed.

"Filmer Dabbs, junior?" she questioned.

"Ballard and Sarb and Callowabbey honestly object to the chapel, and Filmer Dabbs, junior, imitates them. He would not be above pretence if they were not. There is always hope, I believe, but I'm afraid there is very little for Filmer Dabbs, junior."

"Mr. Brastaby was not in it."

"No. But I hardly think he would have brought his damned Burnished-Brass-Polish here if he had been."

Ella was taken aback by this unprecedented explosion. Mr. Strangworth, it appeared, in spite of his gospel of love, could be hard on a man. The incident of that afternoon had slipped from her mind. "Are you fair to Mr. Brastaby?" she asked.

"Fair!" he ejaculated, starting up. His eye had lighted on a brooch she wore at her throat. The design was one of those gross phallic symbols which jewellers—it is to be hoped in ignorance—make by the hundred thousand and women wear unwittingly. Ella had chosen it with Mrs. Bosc's help as being a nice, simple, "good-looking" thing for plain-dress occasions. Mr. Strangworth had surprised Brastaby gloating on that brooch with a cynical smile the last time they met at the Corner House, and the sudden recollection had roused his wrath. Brastaby was the sort of man who would accuse a girl in Ella's position of knowing. He would draw the inevitable inference to her discredit.

"You don't understand Brastaby," he said. "You take him at his face value, his apparent deference, his self-effacing politeness, and know as much about his character as you know about the meaning of that thing you've pinned the lace with at your throat!"

"My brooch!" she exclaimed, putting her hand up to it. "Has it a meaning?"

"Yes, it has," he said harshly. "And if you knew its meaning, you would cast it into the fire."

She took off the brooch deliberately and threw it into the fire. The glowing embers hissed at the offensive thing, flames leaped gladly to destroy it, the gold melted, the jewels fell apart, the good deed was done.

Ella looked up at Mr. Strangworth. With his eyes on the fire he was silently asking himself if it were well or not that women should know; but his face was inscrutable. It was as if nothing had happened. Ella was provoked. She thought the act deserved some acknowledgment. She wanted to speak but could not. Her mind was up against some obstacle that barred further conversational progress on the subject.

"What were we talking about?" he asked presently, in his usual voice. "Oh, I remember. You were trying to spot the young rascals at the Land and Leisure Club who have grace enough to kneel on occasion in my chapel."

"Not Mr. Hardwackle, I am sure," she said, taking the cue as if there had been no interruption.

"The Sliver? The Sliver is a queer case because there is no Sliver. The thing we call the Sliver is moved by the uppermost thought in any company he happens to be frequenting. But it may be that if he could be nailed down long

enough by one set of impressions they would persist, so I let him come."

"And The O'Haleron? But he is a Roman Catholic."

"No matter. Each man to his own form, so long as his particular spirit derives its nourishment therefrom. We meet on the plane above."

She knew that The O'Haleron leant to mysticism, and that reminded her of what she had heard him hint, that Mr. Strangworth was an initiate of the Rosicrucians, an adept so far advanced as to have acquired the secret of how to prolong life indefinitely. The O'Haleron had intimated that Strangworth was old enough to have been painted by Vandyke, but of course he was joking. She had never thought what age Mr. Strangworth might be—elderly, she would have said had she been asked—but looking at him now she discovered that he was a man in the prime of life, forty at the outside, his mature virility unmarred by age. His face was animated at the moment by some pleasant train of thought. It was a fine face, rendered particularly attractive by the kindliness of his eyes. She had started that pleasant train of thought. She was glad of it. She would prolong it, too; she knew how.

"What is mysticism?" she asked.

This was the first time she had shown a gleam of interest in the theme of themes. Mr. Strangworth sat down beside her, his equanimity restored.

"Mysticism?" he began. "The word is derived from the Greek *shut,* as one's lips, brooding on what cannot be uttered; but the Platonists derive it rather from the act of ***shutting one's eyes,*** that one may see the more inwardly. This definition is not mine, but I accept it."

He was himself again, happily launched on a congenial topic, and Ella felt shriven. She listened now, in her relief, with sympathetic attention. The evening had closed in, and, beyond the semi-circle of firelight in which they sat, mysterious shadows, like a company of disincarnate souls, crowded about them. Ella, always liable to the reaction of occult suggestion, was aware of them as friendly.

In moments of delicately sensuous or spiritual ease, when the heart is expanded, we are on the alert to respond sympathetically; to spoil another's pleasure is to spoil our own. And Mr. Strangworth delighted in his own talk when it soared. He could clothe his aspirations, too, in words of beauty which

were moving in themselves apart from their import; and Ella, passively attentive, was so wrought upon that when at last she found herself kneeling (as every guest departing from Strangworth House was bound to kneel) in the chapel, she felt herself uplifted by his prayer.

The hall was a blaze of light when they returned to it, and, catching a glimpse of herself in a looking-glass, Ella saw that the lace at her neck was hanging loose, and she had no means of fastening it now that her brooch was gone.

"Do you think I might have a pin?" she asked.

"A pin?" said Mr. Strangworth absently. "A pin? What kind of pin? There are many kinds of pins——"

The whole history of pins was coming, but Ella would not have it.

"Look at my lace!" she interrupted. "I can't go about with a bare neck like this!"

He looked at the beautiful round white throat, considering it, as he would have considered the loveliness of a flower.

But Ella wanted a pin. "I have no brooch, you know," she said emphatically.

"No brooch," he repeated, then suddenly remembered. "Your lace? Of course. Excuse me. I'll get you something suitable."

He brought her a winged symbol of the soul mounting upwards, and explained its significance.

She admired it. "But what is the metal?" she asked.

"Platinum."

Melton had ridden past her window at Red Rose Farm day after day on a horse called Platinum, to catch a glimpse of her.

"Platinum!" she echoed breathlessly, her colour coming and going.

"You have some association with the metal," he said indifferently, as if he had not noticed her agitation. "I hope it is pleasant."

"I had not thought of the word as meaning precious metal," she answered, forcing a laugh. "I associate it with a thoroughbred horse."

"You betted on him and lost, I suppose," he said amusedly.

"Oh, no! I never bet." She spoke now with her habitual composure.

It was unlike her to be stirred by a trifle, and Mr. Strangworth apprehended something serious as the cause of her sud-

den emotion, but it was evident that she did not mean to confide in him. If only she would! There was so much that he could do for her!

She returned to him from the looking-glass, where she had been arranging her lace. "The effect is charming," she said. "I shall treasure your brooch—and remember the symbol," she added. "My coat, please."

He had it in his hand, and helped her on with it. There was effort in her naturalness, she had overdone it.

5

They were in touch again on the higher plane before they separated, and it was not until she had been sitting for some time with Mrs. Bosc that Ella emerged from the benign atmosphere which had enwrapt her in Gregor Strangworth's company. As she shed it, she felt like one from whom a warm garment has slipped, leaving him exposed to the cold.

"I was expecting you, my dear," Mrs. Bosc said, "and wondering what had become of you. It is hours since your carriage came. Was that Mr. Strangworth who brought you to the door? Where did you pick him up? And why didn't you bring him in?"

"He had an engagement to keep," Ella said, and then proceeded to answer Mrs. Bosc's other questions categorically. Mrs. Bosc knitted the while, faster or slower, as her interest waxed and waned, but she said little. She did not say much as a rule at any time, but she was always good company. Her influence was atmospheric. Sweetness of mind flowed from her silent presence into the hearts of her friends. Their better selves were uppermost in her company; a happy state which they enjoyed serenely, unwitting of the source of their comfort.

"And is all well at the Corner House, my dear?" she asked, when the other matters had been disposed of.

"All well," Ella answered absently, her eyes on the busy fingers, her mind hypnotised to somnolence by the glinting needles. She felt that she had done her duty in the way of talk, and she would have liked to sit there at her ease, thinking of nothing, had Mrs. Bosc allowed it. But Mrs. Bosc had something to say.

"No more trouble with the servants?" she asked.

"I never have trouble with the servants," Ella replied.

"Oh, my dear, you forget Mrs. Pounce!"

"I never had any trouble with Mrs. Pounce," Ella answered, rousing herself a little. "I didn't like Mrs. Pounce, but that made no difference so long as she did her duty properly. She was part of the machinery of my business."

"But, my dear, servants are human beings!"

"Of course," Ella answered indifferently. But a glance from Mrs. Bosc's soft eyes expressed remonstrance. "I don't think of human beings as machines without feelings," she explained. "They are the machinery of life, though, and life would come to a standstill if we considered their feelings when it is their functions that are all-important."

"But, my dear, you cannot separate the one from the other. Human relations without sentiment become inhuman."

This was Mr. Strangworth's directness paraphrased, and Ella agreed to it in obscurity without recognising it. "They do," she said. "And my relations with Mrs. Pounce were inhuman. But it was her fault. She was hostile from the first, but the part of the machinery of my life in which she was concerned worked well——"

"Therefore you were indifferent to her hostility. And you made a mistake, my dear, if I may venture to say so. The function cannot be all-important. The human factor must come in. Mrs. Pounce probably liked her duties, but that would not have prevented her wrecking you, whom she disliked. Each life has its own machinery, you see, with feeling for its director. And the difference between human machines and all others is the interplay between them. When they come together they must work together in perfect accord, else sooner or later there will come a crash."

"I see," said Ella reasonably. "Mrs. Pounce's hostility was a screw loose. Fortunately, however, Mr. Bosc discovered it in time."

His mother smiled. "Ah, my dear," she said, "it is good for a woman to have a man to manage for her!"

"When the man himself doesn't require a considerable amount of management," Ella said laughingly.

Mrs. Bosc's smile allowed that there was something in that, but she protested that Aloysius was the most amenable of men. "But a woman who would live in peace with a man must humour

him in some respects as she would a child. There is always something in a man that never grows up."

"Moral," said Ella; "don't be bothered with a man."

"Oh, but there are great advantages," Mrs. Bosc contended. "A woman who does not live with a man is apt to be lopsided. Neither men nor women develop fully apart. Each sex has its own particular faults; they have to borrow from each other to correct them. And one must make allowances, must sort out the little drawbacks that don't really matter, and set them aside. It is a great help in life to perceive early the number of little things that don't really matter. Aloysius would make the best of husbands, Ella."

Ella's heart contracted. She had to brace herself to give pain, and it was a cruel necessity. "And his mother would be no mere mother-in-law," she said significantly.

"Thank you, my dear," the old lady answered. She had dropped her knitting on her lap, and sat with folded hands, her eyes delicately averted. "You do me justice. The choice of my dear son would be my beloved daughter."

Ella's eyes filled. "I hope," she said gently and very slowly, as bad news is best broken, "I do hope that Mr. Bosc will find some woman worthy of him. I have the highest respect for Mr. Bosc. My regard for him amounts to affection. To see him happy would be a joy to me."

"But to make him happy, my dear?"

The old lady laid a hand on hers, and looked at her with anxious, meaning eyes.

"Alas! that is not in my power," Ella answered.

"There is someone else?"

"There is someone else," she confessed, catching eagerly at that way of escape.

Mrs. Bosc gave her hand a little squeeze, and dropped it, with a deep sigh. "My poor boy!" was all she said.

Ella burst into tears. She would not confess it to herself, but down in the depths of her she felt a prompting to give herself into the safe-keeping of this good man.

6

She stayed to dinner as she had intended, so as not to mark any change in their relations, but it was impossible to keep up

the pretence that nothing had happened, and Mrs. Bosc made no objection when she excused herself immediately afterwards. Aloysius was not at home that evening.

So it happened that Ella reached the Corner House much earlier than usual, and there was no one in the hall when she let herself in with her latchkey. A note which had been dropped into the letter-box caught her eye as she shut the door. It was marked *Urgent*. She did not know the writing, and it was only signed with the initials J. B., but there was an address stamped upon the paper. She looked it up in the post-office directory before she read the note. It was Lady Janet Brastaby's town address.

"Can you come to-night?" the note ran. "Sorry to give you such short notice, but it can't be helped, my guest must away. Come any time. No matter how late. Great haste. Yrs., J. B."

Lady Janet's invalid lady, of course, with her lace. Ella glanced at the clock. It wasn't late for London. How lucky that she had come home so early! How lucky, too, that Lady Janet wanted her that evening! The house felt horribly still and empty. She was glad to have something to do that would take her out of it. But she mustn't forget her magnifying-glass if she meant to judge lace. And she would walk. It was no great distance, and a beautiful night. The walk would do her good.

CHAPTER IV

ELLA AT A CRISIS

1

Col, regenerated, had no sympathy with the "unco guid" who walk not in sinner's way for fear of contamination. He believed his own happy state since his conversion to be the more contagious of the two. Like a heroic physician, he was for searching out the plague-stricken in their haunts if necessary, and bringing healing to their souls. It was Brastaby's way to affect interest in any point of view presented to him. To differ flatly is so tactless, and tact was the polish that had burnished

his brass. He had been discussing religion with Col when Ella saw them together that afternoon. The conversation lapsed after they passed her. Brastaby was feeling himself snubbed, and it rankled. Snubbed by *that!* Pride should have a fall, my lady! Sapping the popular praises of the king with silent smiles of slow disparagement was a slow process, but how else? He was for smashing her with a blow in his present mood. And suddenly he saw his way.

"Come and dine with me at my flat this evening, old chap," he said affectionately; "and let's have a good long talk. Mind you, I'm not professing, but I'd like to inquire into this happiness you boast. You seem to so jolly well enjoy it."

"Split infinitive," Col groaned. "How can I dine in an atmosphere thick with split infinitives!"

"Oh, don't be a bally idiot, Col," Brastaby remonstrated amusedly. "Dinner at seven-thirty."

He was lodged on the ground-floor of a mansion which had been converted into flats—sumptuously lodged, both in regard to space and furnishments. He was the kind of man who "does himself well," money or no money; but he had enough to be independent of the pathetic makeshifts to which people with a craving for beauty are driven when their incomes are not as good as their taste, and he had "done himself" with the best of everything. The luxury he loved was essentially masculine. Burnished Brass had nothing in him that could be expressed in womanish details. He did not despise cushions, but they were cased in silk Persian saddle-bag, or covered with Russia leather. His furniture was solidly handsome, his pictures strongly painted, his ornaments few and ponderous. Bronzes predominated, but he had ivories, too, ivories reminiscent of elephants' tusks, and specimens of china that were not out of place in such company.

After dinner he and Col retired to a room which would have been the library of a man who was fonder of books. Some few well-filled bookcases there were fitted into recesses as if to be out of the way. The largest and most prominent held a collection of modern arms. Col made for this, and they stood for some time examining guns and revolvers, Brastaby explaining various improvements. There were specks of rust on one or two. Brastaby left these out, remarking that he must see to them.

This diversion over, Col sat down by the fire, but Brastaby fidgeted about. Twice he left the room.

"What a restless beggar you are," said Col.

"On the contrary," Brastaby answered. "But I let my man off after dinner. When he's out I have to look after myself—answer the bell and that sort of thing. I thought I heard the post. Have a drink?"

He was standing behind Col at a table on which were various drinks. Col refused. The pleasures of his senses were intensified now, so that very little of anything satisfied them. But he was still for enjoying the kindly fruits of the earth, if only as a duty, and was in the comfortable state just then of a man who had dined well and wisely and is reaping the reward of a grateful digestion. As yet he was only in the first stage of spiritual development, still under the benign anæsthetic of conversion; his growing pains had not yet begun. In this stage the neophyte is drugged with love, and under its influence is apt involuntarily to prolong the delight of overlooking all that is not lovable in his neighbour. This inclination in Col had fructified in Brastaby's company that evening. The talk had soared, and Brastaby, who was for extracting the essential pleasure out of every sort of occasion, emotionally, had lent himself to conviction, and had been surprised by strange stirrings in himself, questions, glimpses of the world from Col's point of view, whence, as he acknowledged, the old allurements look ugly. "Almost thou persuadest me," he said half laughingly, as though shamefaced to confess it.

In this mood he recommended himself to Col as never before. But Col had always liked him while he was with him, though he knew him to be tricky and not overscrupulous, for Brastaby was a pleasant fellow—the kind of pleasant fellow whom you like while you are with him, but don't like so much when you think him over. It was his pose to be pleasant. He cultivated charm successfully, could use his musical voice to charm, and his eyes to caress with the friendliest expression, although they *were* too near together. He was expert, too, in the use of condiments to flavour his conversation; never spiced it too highly, and had nice discrimination when it was a question of sweetening. Col, looking up at him as he stood with his back to the fire kicking his heels and cogitating, allowed that he was an uncommonly attractive fellow, handsome and virile. It was in his favour that his faults were patent, so Col thought. When

the faults of a character rise to the surface, they are scum and removable. Beneath such scum there must be a better nature in a man not wholly depraved. Brastaby's better nature showed in his responsiveness. Col's intellect approved of his discreet use of every sort of condiment in conversation—salt, pepper, vinegar, mustard, and allspice—and his heart was glad of the sugar. They had had a jolly good time together that evening, and when a man gives you a jolly good time you naturally incline to think well of him. Col, being of a generous nature, revised his opinion of Brastaby and went to the opposite extreme. For whereas he had hitherto distrusted the man, he was now for believing him sincere.

Brastaby broke the silence. "I've enjoyed our talk," he said. "It's sunk in." He thumped his chest with his fists. "It's awfully good of you, Col, to take the trouble. You'll say that the trouble's a pleasure, I know, but still—well—I think it kind. And I wish I could show you my appreciation—do something worth doing for you in return, don't you know." He looked round as if he expected to find the thing to do lying about somewhere. "There is something I could do," he added slowly, "if only I had your permission to speak out."

"Fire away," said Col.

Brastaby reflected. "No," he said, shaking his head. "It would be a relief to my mind to speak, but you'd curse me for a meddler if I did."

"Oh, get on!" Col exclaimed impatiently.

"No," Brastaby repeated. "Least said, soonest mended. It's a delicate matter, and you'd chuck me if I spoke out. I don't want you to chuck me, Col."

His friendly eyes helped the words. Col was touched. He was also curious. "I give you my word," he was beginning, but Brastaby stopped him.

"Never mind, old chap," he said; "another time."

He took a cigarette, lighted it, and, making a fresh start, appeared to have changed the subject.

"Your Winged Victory looked well to-day," he said.

Col, lover-like, rose to the bait. "Mine!" he sighed. "I wish she were!"

"Where there's a will there's a way," Brastaby encouraged him.

"My lady is difficult," said Col despondently.

"Lady?" Brastaby questioned, but not offensively.

Col sat up. "Gentlewoman, then," he said emphatically. "She's gentlewoman to the tips of her fingers. Show me a better bred!"

"She certainly has all the air," said Brastaby reflectively. "Interesting that, considering her origin. Breeding is implicit, I suppose, in phenomenal beauty." He examined the end of his cigarette.

Col had a lover's delight in speaking of his belovéd, but he half regretted now that he had yielded to the temptation.

"Phenomenal beauties are all of one family," Brastaby added tentatively.

"Which family?" Col asked.

"Oh, well, sum them up—from Mary Magdalen on——"

"To Caesar's wife," Col interposed quietly.

"She is not celebrated as a phenomenal beauty," said Brastaby. He hesitated, gave Col his friendliest look, with an added touch of seriousness, of concern, and then plunged. "It has got about that you propose to marry Ella Banks," he said. "That's bunkum, I hope."

"Why do you 'hope'?" Col said, beginning to bristle.

"You won't think me meddling?"

"I shall if you meddle."

"I must speak." Brastaby seemed to regret the necessity. "You have befriended me; I want to befriend you. Give me credit for meaning well, at all events. I do hope it isn't true that you intend to marry Ella Banks."

"Why do you *hope*?" Col repeated, and compressed his lips.

"Oh, well, you know, my dear old boy"—Brastaby's voice was full of affection—"*that* sort of thing, well, it isn't the thing to marry." Col made a gesture. "Now don't be ratty," Brastaby remonstrated. "Just hear me out for your own sake."

"If you've anything to say against her——"

"But I haven't. I admire her enormously. Her breeding, beauty, pluck, craft—cleverness. There isn't another woman in the country could have kept it up as she does——"

"Kept what up?"

"Appearances. And she's a jolly good right of it, too! I applaud a woman who gets all the fun she can out of life, and holds her own in everybody's estimation at the same time. If some of our own women would take a leaf out of her book the world would be a deuced sight pleasanter place to live in. No rows. Live your own life by all means—man or woman—but do

it decently. Look at Red Ruin and Lady Brandy and Soda! They're flagrant, and it's disgusting."

"You insinuate that she is leading a double life!" Col exclaimed threateningly.

"Oh, my dear fellow, I insinuate nothing," Brastaby answered, with a short laugh. "She's leading a double life, of course—with admirable thoroughness. Her public life is all that a woman's life should be—in public; and in private I've no doubt it's the same—on the lines I've indicated."

Col fired up. "Now, look here, Brastaby——" he was beginning.

But Brastaby restrained him. "Be cool, Col *dear,* and consider," he pleaded. "I'm not performing a pleasant task. I'm the older man, and I've a sense of duty, though you mayn't think it. You know from experience that a man in love can't trust himself to know the right thing to do. Socially he runs amok in a case like yours if it takes him that way. I've seen plenty of fellows wreck their lives, and I've sworn to do my best to save any friend of mine who's taking a wrong turn. It's a delicate matter to interfere in, I know. But there's more than delicacy involved. There's the happiness of your whole life. And you've more to think of than yourself, too. In the position that you'll have to fill you've got to consider the example you'll be setting—your duty to Society, to your country, to the principles you practise and preach. Consider the position you'll be coming into, and the opportunities for doing no end of—of good—you'll be throwing away! I own she's a temptation, but, as you were saying just now, temptation yielded to is the devil; resisted——" He threw up his hands to indicate the inexpressible benefits that result from temptation resisted. "Marry her, and you hang a millstone round your neck——"

"Stop there, Brastaby," Col exclaimed determinedly. "You're slandering——"

"I'm not. I'm just speaking the simple truth," said Brastaby, "and it's a devilish unpleasant thing to have to do it. But just reason it out for yourself. Look at that girl as we saw her to-day, her horses, the whole turn-out—the Duchess of Castlefield Saye herself has no better. And look at her style of living altogether.—Are you going to tell me she makes the money for that out of lace!—There's been some clever hanky-panky about the Duchess's patronage, but that particular Duchess was ill-chosen for that purpose. Good Gracious is not one to lavish

money on anybody, let alone beautiful lace-makers with no claim upon her. Only a simpleton could be made to believe that the girl can live like that out of the profits of her business. Fortunately for the success of the arrangement, the Duchess *is* a simpleton. She was somehow persuaded to launch the girl, but she has thought no more about her since than she would have thought about a ship for which she had performed the same service. Good Gracious never thinks, but other people do. And it is obvious to them that someone sails the ship. There is someone in command, and a very important someone, indeed, or there would be no mystery. The possession of such a very fine craft would not be concealed nowadays, it would be made a matter of pride and display, if there were not reasons of state to keep the owner in the background. A man in public life is apt to be dished by an irregular connection."

Col rose deliberately, shook out the legs of his trousers, and faced Brastaby coolly. "Beastly club gossip," he said. "I've heard it all before, and I'm surprised that you should retail it! I thought better of your brains."

Brastaby looked disheartened. "Well! well!" he exclaimed. "All I can say is, consult Lord Terry de Beach."

"I have, and he doesn't object."

This score restored Col's equanimity. Brastaby was evidently taken aback, and it took him a minute to recover himself. In the interval his perpetual smile became cynical, and it struck Col that the expression of his eyes, that were too near together, was sinister. But he spoke as pleasantly as ever.

"I was afraid I should not convince you," he said at last regretfully. "But I can prove what I say."

"Prove what?" Col asked doggedly.

"That the girl is no better than she should be. You'd believe it, I suppose, if she paid me an evening visit presently."

"I should!" said Col derisively.

"Well, don't let us quarrel, old chap," Brastaby implored. "God knows it's been no pleasure to me to speak out. I know what a man has to expect for his pains when he interferes in so delicate a matter, however disinterestedly. But at least you'll do me the justice to allow that I *am* disinterested. I've nothing to gain personally, and much to lose—if I lose your friendship."

He turned, grasped the high mantelpiece with both hands, and stood with bowed head staring dejectedly into the fire.

Col had restrained himself precisely because he believed in Brastaby's disinterestedness. But his confidence had died of the cynical smile and the look he had surprised in Brastaby's close-set eyes. He questioned the meaning of that look and smile more than anything that Brastaby had said. Nevertheless, he still desired to think well of him.

A bell sounded somewhere in the house. Brastaby started to attention. "The door," he exclaimed. "I must open it myself. I'm alone to-night to humour a desire for secrecy on the part of a guest I'm expecting. Servants blab."

This he threw at Col over his shoulder as he left the room.

Almost immediately he returned with Ella on his arm.

She withdrew her hand as they entered, and advanced composedly, quite at her ease, like one doing an accustomed thing.

Brastaby, following her, ranged up beside Col. "The proof," he said gently, but the words dropped like venom into Col's ear.

But it was her air of being at home in the place—she had not even glanced round as people generally do on entering a strange room—that carried conviction to Col's mind. She was for greeting him, but he shook his fist in the air, and, white to the lips, staggered past her to the door, and was gone.

"He's ill," she cried, greatly alarmed, and was for following him, but Brastaby barred the way.

"I'll see to him," he exclaimed. "Do sit down, please——" and hurried from the room.

The liftman was in the entrance hall looking out of the front door.

"Has Mr. Drindon gone?" Brastaby asked.

"That gentleman what come out of your flat just now, sir? Yes, sir. He's out of sight."

"I wanted to speak to him," Brastaby said. "But it doesn't matter much."

He returned to Ella. "It was nothing," he assured her laughingly. "Dined too well, I think. He's all right now, and off home. Begs you to excuse his hurried exit. Do sit down. Won't you come to the fire?"

But Ella preferred the end of a sofa away from the fire. "I walked," she said, "and it is a mild night."

"Does the room feel close?" he exclaimed. "I'm afraid it's full of smoke. I'll open the window a crack."

Col's illness had distracted her mind, and she had not yet

glanced at her surroundings, but she did so now. She supposed herself to be in Lady Janet's house, and had not thought it singular that Lady Janet's nephew should receive her. They might live together, for all she knew. She was evidently in the smoking-room, which would naturally be more a man's room than a lady's, though she wondered a little that she should have been shown in there. Inadvertence on Brastaby's part, she thought, and she remembered his salute in Piccadilly that afternoon, and set that down, too, to inadvertence. He was respectful enough now. His personality was having its usual effect. Now that she was with him, she liked him. But, no! She would not let him take her furs. Mr. Strangworth had put them on last for her, and, somehow, to let Brastaby touch them would be to break the charm. He sat down on the arm of a chair opposite to her. "It is nice to see you here," he said. "Just to look at you is such a delight. You are the most beautiful woman I ever saw." She shrugged her shoulders slightly. "You've been told that before, of course, *ad nauseam*. I'd give all I have to have been the first to tell you."

Again Ella shrugged her shoulders slightly.

"I'm boring you!" he exclaimed. "Forgive me. It is the first real chance of speaking to you that I have ever had. I'm always thinking of you. You know I am."

"I know nothing of the kind, nor do I want to know," she answered lightly. "Please, Mr. Brastaby, don't talk to me in that silly way."

"Do you call love silly?" he replied.

"What, another declaration!" she exclaimed laughingly. "Really, men are monotonous."

"That is not the way to take a man when he is in earnest," he said huffily. "I make you a declaration——"

"What does it amount to?" she asked, bantering.

"My declaration? What do you think?" He leant forward with a smile. "A declaration of love is worth—what it wins."

"A declaration of love means one of two things," she retorted: "it means either an offer of marriage, or an insult."

"Come now," he said, "could you—so young—bind yourself a slave in marriage?"

"I—so young—am not to be insulted."

She drew herself up as she spoke. They had both used the bantering, flirtatious tone which makes such talk mean nothing, but now she looked him in the face, ill-pleased.

"I repeat, I am serious," he insisted.

She did not know how to take him. "If you really were serious," she began, "I should be obliged to——" she hesitated. "Mr. Brastaby, I'd better tell you at once. I have settled my future for life."

"It is true, then!"

"What is true?" she asked quickly, warned by his tone that he had something not complimentary in his mind.

"Oh, nothing!" He walked away from her with his hands in his pockets, and stood with his back to the fire, smiling always. She began to hate his perpetual smile. "People will talk, you know. And things do get out somehow."

She jumped up. "Has Lady Janet been told that I am here?" she demanded.

"Lady Janet?" He raised his eyebrows in affected surprise. "What *do* you mean?"

"I must see her invalid lady's lace, and get my business done at once," she replied. "Will you be so kind as to let her know?"

"How can I let her know?" he asked.

"You can ring—or shall I?"

"But what is the use of ringing? My bells can't be heard in Lady Janet's house."

"But this *is* Lady Janet's house," she gasped.

"Excuse me, no. Lady Janet does not live here."

"But she *must*," Ella insisted. "This is 48. I looked up the address before I came."

"How like you!" he said. "Nothing if not cautious. Her house *was* 48, but the street has been renumbered—since your Directory was printed, apparently. For, singular coincidence, her number, 48, is now mine, so it is still in the family—a lucky chance for me, as I owe it the pleasure of your company."

Strolling leisurely across the room, he placed himself between Ella and the door. The significance of the movement was evident. Now that she was there, he was not inclined to let her go. She thought he was behaving detestably, but she did not suppose that he would attempt to detain her against her will.

"What a queer thing to happen," she said composedly. "I shouldn't have thought it possible. Why should they change the numbering of a street? It must have caused great inconvenience. I wonder how many other people have made the

same mistake! You will excuse my involuntary intrusion. And thank you for taking it so kindly. I must hurry away to Lady Janet. What is her number now?"

"Why should you hurry away, now that you are here? Do stay for a little," he said persuasively.

"Oh, I must go, thank you. Please let me pass."

He stood his ground smilingly.

She took it for teasing. "Mr. Brastaby, I must insist," she said, half laughing, half angry.

He spread out his arms playfully to bar the way.

She drew herself up indignantly. He was presuming, taking a liberty. Their slight acquaintance did not justify such familiarity.

In view of her evident annoyance, he dropped his arms and clasped his hands prayerfully. "Do take pity on a lonely bachelor, and give him the pleasure of your company for a little," he begged. "There really is no hurry. My aunt is not expecting you, I am sure."

Why was he sure?

She had not the slightest suspicion, as yet, that she had been tricked, yet the word "tricky" rose to the surface of her thoughts. It unlocked something that produced a moment of perfect lucidity, such a moment as is said to be experienced by drowning men. She did not see her whole life in an instant, but she did see several things *en bloc*. She saw herself warned by Lady Janet against this man, that warning she had missed at the time. It was Lady Janet who had called him "tricky." She saw him hurrying to meet her on the doorstep just now, when he had said: "Let me show you in," as if he had expected her. If he had been in his aunt's house he might have expected her, but here in his own, how did he know that she was likely to come?

Tricky, trickster, tricked!

In a flash the words came to her. Still, she might be mistaken. She must be wary.

She looked at him meditatively as if she were making up her mind, and then, very slowly, she began to take off her gloves. So a conjurer distracts attention from the real business he has in hand. The action seemed indicative. Brastaby concluded that she meant to stay.

"Lady Janet is not in town," she said casually. Brastaby, elated and off guard, answered "No," without thinking. Then,

seeing the slip, he tried to cover it. "I don't know," he corrected himself.

But the "no" had been positive. Lady Janet was not in town and he knew it.

Tricky, trickster, tricked! The pointing was plain to Ella. "You wrote that note," she burst out. "Oh, infamous! How dare you! How dare you!"

He looked at her a moment quizzically. "All's fair in love and war," he said.

"Then this is war," she retorted, stamping her foot.

."Have you ever thought of going on the stage?" he asked. "No? I suppose not, though you're clever enough for anything. What an acquisition you would be to the Criminal Investigation Department! Do tell me! How did you arrive at the certainty that I had written that note?" She was putting on her glove again. "What! You're not going to stay!"

"Let me pass, Mr. Brastaby, please," she said firmly.

He stood aside. She went to the door and turned the handle—turned it again—rattled it—shook it. The door was locked. She remembered that he had seemed to have some difficulty in shutting it when he returned to her with the assurance that Col had recovered. He must have locked it then while she was thinking only of what he was saying.

She flew to the bell, and rang, and rang, then waited. No one answered. She stood at bay. That this indignity should be put upon her! She, who a few hours ago was Gregor Strangworth's honoured guest! She would have given a good deal now to be there again, having her starved soul spoon-fed with platitudes full of the milk of human kindness. For a moment she was for shrieking, "Let me go!" for flying at Brastaby and tearing him to pieces! That was a passing squall, immediately over. There was some way out of this. It would come to her if she controlled herself. There is strength in stillness.

It never once occurred to her to appeal to Brastaby's better nature, to the *noblesse oblige* of a gentleman. The habit of her mind prompted her to fight him. She trusted to her intuition to furnish her with the right weapon at the right moment.

Brastaby trusted to his loquacity. He was for talking her over. Her sudden quieting down encouraged him. He had some reason to believe in his power to soften the obduracy and win the complacency of the type of woman to which he mis-

takenly supposed her to belong. He had never found one of them yet who was devotedly faithful to her purchaser.

"You really are a splendid creature," he said admiringly. "And I have annoyed you! Well, I am sorry. I can't say more. I know a practical joke at one's expense is irritating, but come! Take it as a joke."

"I fail to see the joke," she answered quietly.

"Women never see a joke!" With a gesture he despaired of women. "I should have thought of that. Men take a ragging as it is meant."

"Men take great liberties, it seems," she said disdainfully. "Our very slight acquaintance did not justify your playing a practical joke on me."

"I shouldn't if I'd thought it would annoy you—and I ought to have thought, I confess it. I've got myself into trouble before by practical joking. But you must see what a temptation it was to a man with a turn for practical joking. You know I was there when you agreed to go to my aunt when she sent for you. I calculated on your mistaking the house because of the change in the numbering. I can hear the front-door bell here in my flat, and I knew you would ring it. You would suppose it to be a private house, and not think of walking into the hall as people do in these apartment places. I had to chance there being no servant about, but generally, in the evening, only the liftman is in charge, and he is as often up in the lift as not, and anyway, I should have time to intercept you before he had time to explain that my aunt did not live here. As it happened, he was not in the hall when you rang——"

A slight stamp of Ella's foot warned Brastaby that this patter was not producing the mollifying effect he intended.

"Won't you forgive me?" he broke off, eyes and voice eloquently persuasive.

"If you will open the door and let me go this minute——"

He took out the key, looked at it hesitatingly, then returned it to his pocket. "I can't," he said. "Not until you have really made friends. I don't want you to go away owing me a grudge. I tell you, I never meant to vex you, and—won't you believe me?—I'm sincerely sorry that I have."

Ella stood impassive.

There was a pause, then he exclaimed: "How could I suppose that such a clever—lady—wouldn't see a joke!"

"Perhaps if you explain——?" she said ironically.

"To tell you the truth, it was not you I was thinking of at all," he replied. "I should have thought of you, of course, but Col irritated me—after we saw you in Piccadilly—bucking about your devotion to him."

This wrung a cry from her: "O Colin! Colin! Poor Colin!" The meaning of his illness, of that gesture when he shook his clenched fist in the air and staggered past her, was made plain. He had been deceived by her coming, stricken to the heart by her apparent perfidy. "Surely you have hit him hard enough without slandering him," she cried. "Never, never would he boast of any woman's devotion to him! He at least is a gentleman!"

"And I am not!" Brastaby tried to look deeply wronged. He reflected a moment—saw it a mistake to have accused Col—countered it by drawing her mind off adroitly in another direction.

"Why do you keep Col dangling after you?" he asked, remonstrating. "You don't mean to marry him——"

"How do you know I don't mean to marry him?"

"You said your future was settled?"

"Does that exclude my marrying Col?"

"Your present arrangement would if he knew of it."

Not understanding, she had no answer to this. He mistook her silence for assent, also for confirmation of his belief with regard to her true position. "Col doesn't play any more with women since he was regenerated, you know. Wouldn't it be kinder to let this cure him of his infatuation? Of course, he'll be jealous, and it is a bit hard on him; but it's as easy a way as any. And he's a man of the world. He'll play the game and hold his tongue. So shall I—I hope I need hardly say. No one will ever know that you have been here. . . . Let me own up at once. I'm fond of Col. I wanted to cure him——"

"At my expense!" she exclaimed. "Admirable! So that was the point of your jest! Do you still expect me to see it?"

He searched his mind for the soft answer. "At least I have done you no harm," he said lamely.

"In Mr. Drindon's estimation, of course not!" she exclaimed.

As this was not to be denied, he tried evasion. "You are superb," he said. "There can be but one estimate of you. What you are is everything. Nobody cares about what such a woman does."

In the undercurrent of her thought there was the conviction

that if only they kept the wrangle up long enough someone must come and release her. She answered to provoke him. "Crude," she said.

But he was not to be side-tracked in that way.

"Please don't think me horrid," he begged. "Unconventional, if you like."

"I believe you are the most conventional of men——"

"Which shows how little you understand me! And I do so want you to understand me! Do sit down, Miss Ella, and make friends. You see, I can't in common politeness sit while you are standing. You are hard on me. I have the most enticing little supper prepared, if you would honour me by sitting down to it—cold—but *chaud-froids* of the daintiest. You have only to smile, and I will unlock that door, and then we will go to the dining-room——"

She asked herself if she might not find some means of escape on the way. "Unlock the door, then," she said.

"But you have not smiled. I believe you are afraid of me."

"I am afraid of nothing on earth, Mr. Brastaby, or in the waters under the earth, or in the heavens above."

"Melodrama,"—he called that, gaily debonair—"with me for the dark, cruel, unscrupulous villain, and you for the beautiful, innocent, persecuted heroine. Only you ought to have golden hair. The villainess is always dark."

He strolled over to the table on which the decanters stood, and took up a bottle of champagne that had already been opened. "You're pale," he said. "At least you can't owe my wine any grudge. Have a glass. It will do you good. I'm feeling tired and disheartened myself, but I won't let you go until you've made friends. That I swear. If you would just sit down and drink a glass of wine, and be reasonable——"

"I'll not touch your wine," she said emphatically.

"You don't suppose it's drugged!" he exclaimed.

Implicit in the word was the suggestion that such a thing was possible. Up till this moment Ella had not supposed herself to be in any danger, but she had heard of beasts of men and their methods, and it occurred to her that this man might have trapped her with the worst intent. She sickened at the thought, but her courage, her self-control, and her presence of mind held good. He was between her and the table on which lay the arms he had been examining with Col, or she would have possessed herself of one. That was her immediate impulse,

but second thoughts warned her that such a move might have precipitated matters.

"That's a nice thing to think of me," Brastaby went on. "I'll show you——" He poured out a tumbler full of the wine, and drank it at a draught. Then he took an aimless turn about the far end of the room. The wind blew in on him cold from the open window. He shut it. This confirmed Ella's suspicion. No cry for help could now be heard in the street, and she had no hope of attracting attention in the solid, well-built house, it was so still. She had not heard a voice or footstep since she entered the flat. But somebody must come—sooner or later somebody must come—if only she could keep him wrangling long enough.

Brastaby drank little as a rule, and the effect of the incautious draught upon him was to suspend the nicety of his discrimination and let loose in speech the offensive thoughts he would normally have suppressed.

"So you suspected me!" he said. "I see. You've been in a tight place before."

"Then I'm to consider this a tight place," she had him. "I thought you meant me no harm!"

He let that pass. "I've never compromised a woman in my life," he protested. "I think the kiss-and-tell sort of business damnable."

He lounged against the end of a sofa, and looked at her with admiring eyes and a smile void of cynicism. She was holding herself superbly.

"Admirable!" he commented. "Makes me think of a fallen angel."

"I am neither a fallen angel nor a fallen woman," she retorted. "You shall pay for this."

"Melodrama," he rejoined. "Unhand me, sir! sort of thing. Villain, a time will come! . . . Where did you get that brooch? Put it on for my aunt's benefit, I suppose! I liked the other best. It became you better. No false pretence about it, at any rate. But why false pretences with me? You and I understand each other. We have all along. And I have respected your business hours, and admired the consistency of your pose. But why pose now? Sit down, do, and be sociable."

She understood that she was being grossly insulted, and was stung to fury. With difficulty she held back tears of rage.

"Of course, if you objected to me as a man I'd have nothing

more to say," Brastaby pursued. "But I know you don't object to me as a man. On the contrary, you've always shown that you rather liked me. And you'd like me again if you'd only let yourself cool down and be natural. I'd not look twice at a woman who didn't like me. I'm not that sort of brute. Come, don't stand there looking ferocious. You've come to stay, you know. You've brought your bag."

Ella looked down. Her coat had come open, and the case that held her revolver was exposed. She had forgotten to take it off before leaving home, and forgotten till now that she had it on. She grasped it with joy, her hand in the case.

Brastaby gathered himself up and lounged towards her. "Your experienced coyness does not deceive me," he said. "Don't you think you've given me enough of it?"

"Melodrama!" she retorted on him, laughing in her relief. "If you don't open that door at once, I'll——"

"What will you?" he stopped to inquire, politely sarcastic.

She drew the revolver. Her intention was to alarm the house with a shot in the air, but she found that only one chamber was loaded. The shot might not be heard——! She dropped her hand to her side, holding the weapon muzzle down, and looked at Brastaby triumphantly.

He was not in the least impressed. "Armed—experienced lady!" he said amusedly. "Melodrama with a vengeance! But I wish you wouldn't. It isn't your line at all, you know. You're too fine a thing for melodrama and make-up. Tragedy, now, one might associate with you, but theatricality, never!"

"It will be tragedy in another minute if you don't take care," she said.

"Pooh! Put away that silly woman's toy," he said. "You know you're half afraid of it. If you don't put it down, I shall be obliged to take it from you. You'll be hurting yourself."

"If you touch me—I'll shoot you dead," she said.

He sprang towards her, but, quick as he, she fired. Spring and shot were simultaneous. Checked, he balanced on his feet an instant, then, reeling backwards, fell into a chair, a bullet in his chest.

With ghastly face and haggard eyes, the ghost of his smile persisting, his hand clenched on the wound, he looked up at her: "Tragedy," he gasped. "Your score."

Ella dropped the smoking revolver to her side, and stood there transfixed with horror. Thought went on mechanically, memory

inscribed its record deep, but volition was numb. She could do nothing but stand there staring.

Brastaby was lying in a big leather-covered armchair, his legs outstretched, one hand hanging over the arm of the chair. From under the other, which was clenched to his breast, a sinister colour soaked and spread over the white front of his shirt. Cold shivers shook Ella at the sight of it. The colour-scheme of the picture expressed itself in her mind in a reiterated chant: "Black, white, red; red, white, black"—over and over again.

Brastaby's head had fallen forward. What was he thinking at that supreme moment? Did details of his life flash through his mind in review? Was he cursing, praying, cowering—a craven spirit, whining for mercy? No! It was good blood, though contaminated, in which his life was ebbing away. He was thinking not of himself at all, but of her plight, if the truth should come out.

Presently he raised his head and looked at her, his face livid, his eyes monstrously dilated. "Put—that—shooting iron—on floor—under my hand," he gasped in a strange, hoarse voice. "Look like accident. Suicide. Save you."

"But you are not dead," Ella found herself saying. It seemed as if somebody else was speaking.

"Sorry. In — good — time. I'm — done. You — splendid. Wouldn't have missed——" The attempt to be his usual cynical self was ghastly. "Save you. Good act—last. Happy death. Angels' wings. Heavenly choirs. Quick—quick—quick—revolver—floor—under hand. Look—accident—suicide—save you—accused—murder."

Automatically Ella crept towards him as he spoke, inexplicably compelled; automatically she obeyed, placing the weapon as if it had dropped from his hand; then, his will to move her lapsing, she stood beside him shuddering, fascinated, incapable of further effort.

His chin had dropped on his chest. She could not see his face as he gasped out his last words: "Key—in pocket—fly—quick—look out—no one—sees—you go."

"I can't touch him!" Ella groaned aloud.

Brastaby, making a supreme effort, succeeded in taking the key from the pocket of his dinner-jacket. It dropped from his nerveless hand on to the floor, and he sank back in his chair. There was nothing else for him to trouble about; his own af-

fairs were in order. True to his peculiar code, that a gentleman may betray a woman himself but must save her from the consequences, he had done all he could for her, with the exertion heroically hastening his own doom, a last act which was rewarded with peace of mind. His head resting on the back of the chair, he looked up, fully conscious and unafraid, his persistent smile bravely fighting pain for a place on his lips to the last. In his ears was a murmur which gradually increased in volume to a terrific roaring rush, as of an express train tearing through a tunnel. And he was the express train tearing backward through all the stages of his past life—cynical, corrupt man; clean, gallant youth; happy schoolboy, ambitious to excel in every innocent sport of the day. And as he grew younger and younger, the pace became dizzier, until at last, a little hurt child pitifully sobbing, he was making for his mother's outstretched arms—

The ebbing of Brastaby's life-blood, which in his ears was the roaring rush of an express train, was to Ella a paralysing sight of horror as it slowly reddened the white front of his shirt. Each gasping breath rattling in his throat racked her, until, with a sob, the sound suddenly ceased, and his jaw dropped; his glazed eyes stared up at the ceiling blankly. The silence that succeeded was a crowning horror, but the shock of it broke the spell and released her. She had no thought of saving herself. It was to escape from the sight of him and from the smell of blood that she snatched up the key; that she tore at the doors, careless of whether she were seen or heard; that she ran and ran and ran, as if by running she could escape from herself.

CHAPTER V

CONSEQUENCES

1

JUST after Ella had set out on her fatal errand that night, the Duke, haunted by the fear that she was lonely, arrived at the Corner House, and let himself in.

Her sitting-room door stood wide and the lights were full on.

The Duke, thinking that she was upstairs and would return presently, made himself at home. His chair, standing by the hearth in its accustomed place, invited him to be seated; but he looked about him first, noting signs of her occupation that pleased and interested him. The room was fragrant of her presence—a newspaper dropped on the floor by her chair, an open book on her work-table, a piece of lace she had been mending, the needle placed for the stitch. He took up the lace and examined her beautiful work admiringly. "Mustn't damage her eyes, though," he said to himself. There was a vase full of orchids on the table, orchids from his own houses at Castlefield Saye. One was faded. He took it out and threw it into the fire.

Then he sat down and felt for the button he had already fidgeted off the arm of the chair. There had been no time to replace it, and his restless fingers found nothing to content them. He surveyed the room. There was an open space at the far end, just the place for a piano, he thought. Piano? Of course! She ought to have a piano, fond as she was of music. Never had a chance of learning to play, alas! Might pick it up yet, though, if she chose. And, at any rate, could get lots of people to play to her. Only too glad. But better not encourage amateurs. Professionals. Paid professionals. Point out that some are necessitous. That would fire her lovable philanthropy—do the trick, eh? Slang. Bosc must get her an instrument.

He jumped up and paced the open space. Take a drawing-room grand comfortably. Why the devil hadn't he thought of it sooner!

He returned to the fireplace and stood with his back to the fire, picturing her in white satin and pearls sitting at a grand piano. Nothing shows up against dark mahogany like white satin. Suit her youth, too. Had she any pearls, by the way? . . . His desire for an immediate answer to this question made him impatient. What on earth was she doing? Had she gone to bed? Was she ill? Not like her that, but still—

The possibility drew him to the foot of the stairs. He listened. Not a sound in the house but the ticking of the great-grandfather clock in the hall. He went half-way up, and listened again. The stillness was unpleasantly suggestive. It was as if the house were deserted. Absurd fancy that, but why stand fancying there when he might put himself out of suspense in a moment? He had only to knock at her door. Active

as a young man, he ran up the rest of the way. The door stood ajar. He could see the flickering of firelight. He knocked. No answer. He knocked again and rattled the handle. No answer.

"Ella, are you there?"

Silence. He waited a moment, asked again, then pushed the door open, and looked in. Emptiness. The lights turned down. It was his sister Alicia's room, he knew it well. Old memories prompted him to look round. He turned up the lights. At the first glance nothing seemed altered. Dressing-table, great wardrobe, everything he remembered, stood in the same place; and there was the same exquisite order, the same atmosphere gratefully fresh. But on closer examination, he was aware of additions, of some difference of character. The colouring in his sister's time had been anemic, now it was strong. The bed used to be pushed up against the wall in the corner. It stood well away now, and the canopy which used to cover it was gone. The present occupant liked air. . . . A rose-coloured bedspread veiled with lace caught his eye. Amateur of lace, he had the curiosity to examine it. Bobbin made Flemish point with a crest woven into the corners, made, without doubt, for some great house! The pillow-cases were trimmed to match. The nightdress laid out ready for the wearer, and her peignoir, were also beautified with costly lace.

Beside the bed was a revolving bookcase full of books, with a reading lamp on it, and a volume or two. Looking into one of these, his eye lighted on the lines:

O imperial moulded form,
And beauty such as woman never wore,
Until it came a kingdom's curse in thee——

The passage was full-fraught with association. On his way home across the fields, after his first visit to Ella at Red Rose Farm, it had haunted him. He had chosen then to set its significance aside as irrelevant to anything that concerned him personally. He chose to do so now.

A wrapper that looked like a froth of satin and ribbons and lace was spread out on an easychair in front of the fire, and on the ground two little satin bedroom slippers vouched for the size and shape of the wearer's feet. The Duke smiled down at these preparations. They indicated that her maid saw to her comfort properly. He stroked the soft satin of the wrapper,

it looked like Ella; the lace on it too—fine *broderie de Malines, fond de neige,* very rare. "Extravagant puss!" he thought, well pleased that she should be extravagant at his expense.

As he stood there toying with a ribbon his eye chanced upon an easel in the corner opposite. On it was a large picture covered up. He first noticed the drapery used for the purpose, an ancient piece of brocade, blue and silver, another instance of Ella's love of beautiful and costly things. Wondering what picture she had chosen for an intimate pet, he went to it and drew the drapery aside. The lovely eyes, tenderly pathetic, which Ella found full of affection, met his with a look that stabbed him to the heart. Startled, and with a gasp, he dropped the drapery. He had never thought to meet those eyes again.

Like a guilty trespasser alarmed, he stole from the room and hurried downstairs, with a backward glance once and again, as if in fear of being followed.

In the hall he stood long, unconscious of time, incapable of action. But his mind was active. Where had Ella found that portrait? Why had she taken it to herself for her own intimate possession from among the many other beautiful pictures that the house contained? And why had she never mentioned it to him? Had she known all the time, and did she condone? Surely yes! There could be no doubt about her affection for him.

The great clock in the hall clanged one. He started from his reverie. Where was she? Not in the house evidently. His mind suddenly misgave him. Never before had she been out at that time of night. Something must have happened to her. Alarmed, he opened the hall door. There was a light in the basement—Beveridge's room.

Beveridge was one of the many humble, loyal friends the Duke had attached to himself by signal acts of kindness. For this reason he had been chosen for his responsible position in Ella's household. He was aware of the Duke's visits, but he would have cut out his own tongue rather than betray the Duke, if it were his wish that the matter should not be mentioned. As to the object of these visits, whatever it might be, His Grace had a right of it. His Grace could do no wrong even if His Grace were doing something which it would have been wrong for anyone else to do.

The Duke ran down the area steps, and knocked at the lighted window.

"Hi! Who's there?" came the gruff, startled response from within, and Beveridge, pulling the blind aside so that the light fell full on the Duke, recognised him, and hurriedly flung up the window.

"Come upstairs. There's something wrong," said the Duke. They met in the hall.

"Where is your young lady?" the Duke sternly demanded.

"I've been off duty, your Grace," Beveridge defended himself. "My young lady went to dine with Mrs. Bosc. She must be in, your Grace. I met the carriage going back to the stables on my way home."

"She's not in. Where's her maid?"

"Gone to bed, your Grace. My young lady doesn't keep her up of a night."

They stood looking at each other dumbfounded.

In the pause there came a curious knocking at the door. It was as if someone were beating on it with bare hands. Beveridge flew to open it, and Ella tottered in, distraught. The Duke caught her in his arms. "My dearest! What has happened to you?"

"Nothing! Nothing! Oh, I'm glad you're here! I'm frightened! I'm frightened!"

With an imperative "Stay where you are!" to Beveridge, the Duke helped her to her sitting-room. He tried to seat her beside him on the sofa, but she slipped to her knees on the floor, and hid her face on his breast. She was shivering convulsively. In an agony of suspense he held her close, and waited until she could speak.

Her tale was soon told. The Duke's face was ghastly, but he controlled his agitation until she said, "I warned him if he touched me——" Then he burst out, "He did not touch you?"

"No! no!" she cried triumphantly. "I shot him."

"Dead?"

"Not immediately—it was horrible."

The Duke's habit was to visualise events. An absurd picture flashed upon his mental retina of Ella deliberately shooting Brastaby in various not immediately fatal parts of his body. In this first moment of relief the revulsion of feeling was so great he could have laughed aloud.

"At first," Ella stammered on, "he was not dead."

Released from the dread of what might have happened, the

fear of what might still be to come seized upon the Duke. The law is jealous of wild justice, and there is no knowing what view it will take of a case. Ella was calmer now. She described graphically all that followed the shot—made it evident that Brastaby's one thought had been for her safety.

"H'm," the Duke commented in one of his audible asides. "Died like a gentleman, at any rate. Don't believe she was ever in any danger."

"Then I shouldn't have shot him!" she exclaimed.

It would never do to let her think that! Besides. . . . Sudden blind rage shook the Duke. That she should have suffered such indignity! He could himself have ground the life out of Brastaby with the heel of his boot! The tumult in his mind, the anger and hate and pain, made it hard to speak soothingly, but with an heroic effort he controlled his voice. "Nothing else for it," he absolved her. "Best be on the safe side in any case. A woman does well to shoot the dog dead, if she has any fear for her honour."

Ella burst into a storm of tears.

That was all right. Inevitable. Relieve her.

He dealt with the inevitable wisely—just waited until the paroxysm had exhausted itself.

"Now you must go to bed," he said at last, authoritatively.

"Oh, I can't be left alone!" she wailed.

"No need," he said. "You get yourself into bed, and I'll come and sit beside you. Read you to sleep. . . . Beveridge!" he called.

Beveridge came in from the hall, and seeing her crouching on the floor by the sofa, exclaimed in great concern: "Will I call the weemin, your Grace?"

His Grace's feelings showed in an unwonted explosion of irritability. "Women! Damnation, no! As if there wasn't trouble enough without mixing a pack of chattering, idiot women up in it! We must get her to bed. Carry her. If she can't walk."

"Oh, I can! I can!" Ella exclaimed, hastily gathering herself up. But she was unsteady on her feet.

"Here, Beveridge," said the Duke, "you take one arm and I'll take the other."

Manlike, they deposited her on the perishable foam of her wrapper, regardless.

"Her ladyship's boots isn't fit for her ladyship to touch,"

Beveridge observed tentatively. "Would I be taking a liberty, your Grace?" He held out his useful hands. His Grace acquiesced with a nod. Beveridge knelt down, took off her boots, and put the little satin slippers on her feet.

Then he made up the fire, and withdrew.

"Now," the Duke said to her, authoritatively, "get yourself into bed. I'll give you half an hour. Then I'll come and sit beside you, and read you to sleep."

Too exhausted to have any initiative of her own, Ella accepted the ministrations of these two elderly men as a matter of course, and used her little remaining strength to obey the Duke as she would have obeyed the doctor.

His next thought was, "Must get her to sleep. A sedative." He wrote out careful instructions, and despatched Beveridge to ring up the ducal family chemist and procure the draught.

When he returned to Ella she was in bed, and he was again reminded of his sister's lady-fastidiousness. Not a garment was left lying about. Everything was in as perfect order as it had been when he first saw the room, fresh from the hands of her maid.

But a gale was blowing in. She had opened a window and the blind was flapping. He closed the window. "The smell of blacking," she explained. "Beveridge's boots."

She had put on a bed-jacket and was propped up with pillows as if she meant to stay awake.

"This won't do," he said, and slipped one of the big pillows from under her without ceremony. "Now settle down. You must go to sleep."

Oh, but it was good to be taken in hand like that! She smiled wanly.

"I'm a bit of a nurse, you see," he added. "I've had some practice! The, er . . . Ann is fractious when she's ill. Won't do anything for anyone but me."

There was a chair beside the bed set ready for him. That touched him—that care for his comfort; and with such sore trouble on her mind to distract her! Only one other that he could think of, not a servant, had ever set a chair for him before. All his possessions had not availed to procure him these little intimate, affectionate attentions. His houses were glutted with costly flowers, but never a solitary one was set apart for him with loving hands in any place that would have made it peculiarly his own. "Your dear father is so very good and

kind," was the Duchess's incessant refrain; but the very good and kind in this world are fated to be imposed upon, and the Duchess left all show of goodness and kindness to him. She had been bred and born and reared a parasite, and parasites live on their host, taking but never giving—anything but discomfort. Only this girl and one other long ago—

Ella had uncovered the portrait as she always did at night. He became painfully conscious of it now, there, behind him—the lovely eyes on him and her. Where did Ella get that picture? And what did she know about it? But what could she know? Who was there to tell her? She had come across it by accident and liked it. Natural that. It was a lovely face.

When he sat down beside her bed, Ella had closed her eyes contentedly. A deep sigh caused her to look at him. "I am giving you a great deal of trouble," she said.

"I am only too thankful to have been on the spot"—he forced a smile.—"Feeling better?"

"My thoughts are in such a whirl," she complained. "Things said—a confusion of fragments. It is like the sea—in a turmoil after a storm—bits of seaweed torn from the rocks—tossed up on the surface. . . . It wasn't like me. I never was impulsive."

She was thinking of the rabbit she shot and of Mr. Strangworth's warning.

Not knowing what was in her mind he answered as best he could, excusing at the same time both himself and her. She was not prone to be impulsive, but lately she had been unlike her natural self.

"Men and women, the most sober, are liable to act eccentrically at times," he said. "Such acts are extraneous. Not characteristic. They are the outcome of some combination of circumstances which produces an abnormal mood, and this abnormal mood urges to eccentric adventure. So the highest-minded may persuade themselves at times that wrong is right. But if we sin, it is——

"The sin that practice burns into the blood,
And not the one dark hour which brings remorse,
Will brand us, after, of whose fold we be . . ."

"But it was no sin to shoot him," she burst out excitedly. "The things he said—oh! I want to shoot him over and over and over again!"

"Ella," he said sternly. "You must not talk like that."

"I want to shoot him over and over and over again," she repeated, like a passionate child defying the rod. "If I had not shot him he would have——"

There was enough in the suggestion to make the Duke rage, but he controlled himself.

"You must stop thinking about it," he said quietly. "You are giving way. And that is not like you——"

"Is anything like me!" she broke in, then burst afresh into tears of self-pity and wept hysterically.

He waited patiently, with downcast eyes.

"Oh, I'm so miserable!" she sobbed at last.

He was the more miserable of the two. All her trouble was retrospective. She was taking the incident as over. He was dreading the consequences. Had anyone seen her leave the house? Would the revolver betray her? What could he do with all his wealth and power to save her if she were accused? These questions never for a moment ceased to torment him. Yet, outwardly, he showed no sign of any unusual disturbance of mind.

"You're exhausted," he said. "That's depressing. You'll be all right when you've had a good sleep." He twirled the revolving bookcase. "What shall I read to you? The wind's getting up. It sounds like the sea. Listen!"

She listened. The sound jerked her mind on to a wholesomer track. "It makes me think of home," she said, "I hear the sea —it sounds like that in my room at home."

The word was a blow to him. She still felt herself an alien, then, here, where all the resources he had at his command had been turned to account to make it "home" for her.

"I hear it too," he said, "in my room at the Castle, on still nights. It is muffled then. But in stormy weather I can hear the waves crashing up against the Coast Guard's Death."

His mention of the giant crag reminded her—

"That was a strange, awful dream of the Duchess's," she said.

"Which?" he asked, for the Duchess was prone to dream. Her early morning conversation was often dreamful. He asked to encourage Ella to pursue an indifferent subject. She was speaking naturally now, and he could see by the far-away look in her eyes that she was back in some interesting past, happily at home.

"When she saw him ride Platinum over, he waving his hat and cheering as they took the plunge."

"Platinum? Ninian's horse? And he the rider, presumably. How did you hear of that dream?"

"Lord Melton told me that Sunday when I met him on the footbridge, and I thought I saw him up on the crag when he was standing beside me, but he said—and you say—that it must have been Lord Eustace. The Duchess had told him her dream that morning."

"Ah! Fresh in his mind, then. Naturally mentioned it." He was trying to remember what Ella had told him about her acquaintance with Melton. "Did you see much of Melton?"

"I saw him out riding, often. But only three times in all to speak to."

No one could have supposed that there had been passionate love-making on that third occasion, and talk of marriage; and Ninian was not given to pursue peasant girls, however beautiful. So far as the Duke could see their acquaintance had been of the slightest, and he had only questioned her in order to draw her on to think and talk of indifferent things.

But the mention of Melton had revived the ache of suspense from which she had of late been suffering so acutely, and her spirit quailed at the prospect of days of uncertainty still to come. *Oh, that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away and be at rest.* The Psalmist voiced once for all the deep-rooted instinct of all sufferers, to escape. The impulse seized upon Ella. "I must go away—go quite away—by myself," she broke out.

"You shall, dearest," he answered quietly. "You shall go to-morrow—to the mountains, if you like, to the great calm heights."

"No, no, not to the mountains," she said. "To the sea. I hate the big tumbled mountains. Their calm is indifference. If they noticed me at all it would be to despise me. They make me feel an insect. They have no help for me—nothing to say to me—nor I to them. I know. I saw enough of them when I was travelling with Mr. Bosc. Not the mountains—no! The sea! The sea!"

"I like the sea best myself," said the Duke, in an easy tone, calculated to soothe her. "The sea then. To-morrow you shall sail—steam, I should say—away in my yacht. She's ready. You shall go to—

"The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece!
Where burning Sappho loved and sang—

Where the sun shines, and the waters are clear and blue as a polished sapphire; 'where lutes in the air are heard about, and voices are singing the whole day long'; and there are flowers! the loveliest flowers."

"Alone, *please!*"

"Yes, alone. Only your captain and crew, and your maid, and Beveridge—a human background. And," he added, "musicians. You must have music as you drift about. Music and the isles of Greece!"

Her imagination caressed the picture. "Music and the isles of Greece," she repeated dreamily.

"Rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,
She shall have music wherever she goes"—

"I should like to have taught you your nursery rhymes, Ella."

"How good you are to me!" she sighed. "Can't you come too?"

"No, dearest. I cannot."

In the pause that followed she lay still, her eyes closed; he covered his face with his hands.

Beveridge, bringing in the draught, created a diversion. Ella took the glass from the Duke's hand, and drank mechanically.

"Now you must go to sleep," he said.

But the disturbance had stirred up trouble in her mind again. A string of Brastaby's cynical taunts recurred to her. She uttered them aloud as they rose in her mind: . . . "'in a tight place before — experienced coyness — melodrama — theatricality——' Oh, that I *could* have shot him by degrees!" she exclaimed. "A bullet for every taunt!"

"Damned blackguard!" escaped the Duke.

"You said he died like a gentleman," she reproached him.

"Often do—blackguards. A pose perhaps. Theatrical always. Might be habit triumphant *in extremis*. But must give the devil his due. It was not his own sore strait that troubled him. At the last, it was the gentleman in him that was uppermost."

"Then I shouldn't have shot him!"

"God willed that he should die a gentleman," the Duke said solemnly. "Let that content you."

"You are humouring me as if I were a child or a lunatic," she exclaimed peevishly.

He was silent.

"I want to talk it out," she pleaded.

"Say just what you have in your mind," he answered, sighing.

"Oh!" she cried. "How good you are to be so patient with me!"

She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, then her arm dropped to her side, and she saw him as kindness incarnate, wrapped in a golden haze. It was wonderful but dazzling, and the great wardrobe slipped back and back until it was miles away, and she also was slipping away—

"Are you there?" she murmured drowsily.

"Yes, dearest."

He laid his hand on hers; and watched her anxiously. For a little she hung on the borderland, between thought and feeling and blissful unconsciousness. Then she seemed to herself to be circling down and down, like an autumn leaf falling from the top of a tree on a windless day, to a restful place on a mossy bank, with the sound of the sea for lullaby. Once or twice her eyelids fluttered open on unseeing eyes, then softly closed. He waited with his watch in his hand and his fingers on her pulse. Gradually it quieted down to normal. Then as a mother wraps up a sleeping child, he put her arm under the clothes, and drew them warmly about her. Coal by coal, not to make a noise, he mended the fire. Then, for a little, he stood looking down at her. Asleep, she looked so lovely and so young! Her long dark eyelashes were still wet with tears. His own eyes brimmed. He clenched his hands and teeth in an effort to master a paroxysm of grief.

As he left the room he glanced back at the portrait. The lovely eyes met his, reproachfully, he thought, but in truth they were pitiful.

He had to leave her; the household would soon be moving; circumstances had him in their grip, inexorably.

In the hall Beveridge, haggard by his long vigil but still alert, stood to attention.

"She should sleep for some hours," said the Duke. "Keep the house quiet. Tell her maid that her lady's orders are that she is not to be disturbed till she rings. You understand?"

"I do, your Grace."

"You'll hear from me during the day. And, Beveridge"—he turned on the doorstep to give this parting injunction—"not a word to a living soul about this night's happenings."

"Your Grace!" There was reproach in the tone.

"I needn't have said that," the Duke muttered. "I'm rather upset, Beveridge."

Beveridge understood. Outwardly, he saluted; inwardly he prayed: "God keep sorrow from your Grace!"

Vain petition.

The streets were shrouded in the misty grey ghastliness of a sombre dawn, and of all the unhappy ones abroad at that hour not one was more miserable than his Grace.

2

Strangworth was awakened in the early morning by a shout. He sat up in bed and listened. The shout was repeated: "Strangworth!"

Mr. Strangworth slept with a window wide open, and it was thence, distinctly, that the sound uprose. He was at the open window in a moment, looking out. Down below a solitary figure was clearly defined against a background of trees, which, swathed in flying streamers or seen through quivering curtains of mist as the wind rose and fell, looked like skeleton ghosts of themselves stalking by. He did not recognise either the voice or the figure, but it was someone in distress, and that was enough. "I'll let you in!" he responded.

He let in all that the night had left of Col Drindon, the wraith, it might have been, of the young man as he had last seen him—a tatterdemalion wraith. Hatless, tieless, his collar hanging on a button, his thin patent-leather evening shoes burst, his thick, fair hair lank from the damp and in tumbled disorder, he looked what Strangworth inwardly accused him of being, the wreck of himself after a disreputable drunken orgy.

When he had him safe in the library, Strangworth turned on him: "Col," he said sternly, "you've been drinking!"

Col, standing in the middle of the room, looked at him vacantly. "When in trouble, go to old Strangworth"—that was the practice, if not the avowed principle, of the youngsters at the Land and Leisure Club, and now, though he could not have told how it had come about, Col was coming to himself in

Strangworth House. The principle had landed him there.

"I—don't—know," he said slowly, making an effort to collect himself. "I think not. I've been in hell all night. I've been tearing about the streets of hell in such torment that the very devils couldn't bear the sight of it, and fought shy of me. Drink? Wine?—at dinner, yes. I dined with that accursed panther, Brastaby."

Brastaby, Ella, that putrid symbol—the three in juxtaposition flashed an indication into Strangworth's mind. "You quarrelled with Brastaby," he said.

"Quarrelled? No. But I wish I'd killed him," Col groaned. "I'm suffocating," he broke off, clutching at his throat, and, staggering to a sofa, he threw himself down on it.

The room, heated with hot air and shuttered up all night, was close. Strangworth opened a window.

The misty morning air streamed in chillily, bringing with it a distant sound—the thud of hammering hoofs, approaching. Strangworth leant out, the better to hear. A minute, and the gravel on the drive below was scattered by the passing of a recklessly ridden horse. Strangworth knew that such riding was at the urging of dire calamity.

He hurried from the room, flinging at Col as he went: "Stay where you are. I'll be back in a minute."

Col, extended on the sofa in the stupor of exhaustion, heard without heeding.

It was many minutes before Strangworth returned, but when at last he came hurrying back, there was immediacy in his every word and gesture. The sound of the gravel below, scattered by the passing of a recklessly ridden horse, accompanied his words.

"On your feet, man," he came in exclaiming. "Up and be doing!"

Col, in the interval, had begun to recover.

"Gregor, dear, I'm not in a fit state," he was beginning, with a brave attempt at his old whimsical way, but Strangworth caught his hands, pulled him on to his feet, and shook him. "Oh, Colin! I'm ashamed of you!" he cried. "You, a man of the world, to be taken in by a scoundrelly trick! You, who know her so well, to desert her! To leave her there, trapped by that blackguard Brastaby! You're a fool, Col, you're a fool, that's what you are! At your age, to be taken in on the instant by appearances!"

Col's ghastly face warned him to be merciful.

"But it's all right, man!" he ended on another note. "It's all right. She shot him!"

Col, roused by the shock, body and mind, steadied himself.

"How do you know?" he just managed to articulate.

"Never mind. I do know," Strangworth replied. "And you've got to pull yourself together. You can't shoot a man in these confounded times, however richly he deserves it, without creating the devil's own shindy. Do you understand, man? She may be accused of murder."

He waited with an anxious eye upon Col, and it was as if Col gradually threw off the disguise of himself as a broken-down incapable, and emerged a vigorous man, armed with energy; calm, cool, and collected.

"What do we do first?" he asked deliberately.

With an inward thanksgiving, Strangworth as deliberately replied: "First you undress and go to bed. Come this way."

Col followed him silently to a bedroom, and silently began to undress. When he had shut the door upon them, Strangworth resumed: "There will be inquiries for you at your flat the first thing. There's nothing extraordinary about your having come out to me here for the night. I've written to Bowden to bring you a suit and things, immediately. When the police go to your flat, you will not be there, and they will have to come out here after you."

"But what of her?"

"The best that can be done for her is being done. . . . There will be nothing in the morning papers. The police must find you here in bed and surprise you with the news."

"I see."

"Later, you can write her a comforting letter. I'll see that she gets it. Lay the lash on yourself, you deserve it; that's all you can do for her at present. . . . Poor girl! Just to think that only a few hours ago she was here having tea with me! She came in full of remorse and horror because she'd shot a rabbit. She said she aimed at it, but she didn't mean to shoot it." He marked her inconsequence with a passing smile. "She's very much a woman, our Ella."

"What must she be feeling now!" Col exclaimed, in sore trouble.

"Ah! But, remember, the rabbit hadn't insulted her!"

"Justifiable homicide—will the law allow it?"

"The law won't be asked, if we can help it. When the law is an ass it must be beaten. . . . Justifiable homicide? I should think so! I should think so! What's the life of a blackguard to a woman's honour? Any gentleman would give his life to save a woman's honour. He is expected to give his life to save his own. At the threat of danger a woman does well to strike. Damn the law! The blackguard deserved to be shot! And, please God, we'll see her safe through! . . . I'll get you a drink to compose you."

"Get yourself a drink! I'm quite composed."

On reaching the Corner House that evening, Col found that the Winged Victory had flown, but whither he could not discover.

8

Readers all over the country, glancing at an unimportant-looking paragraph in their evening and their next morning's newspapers, noticed that a Mr. Jaspar Brastaby had met his death under tragic circumstances, but whether by accident, suicide, or murder was not stated, pending inquiries. The circumstances meant nothing to readers all over the country, who in their thousands until that moment had been unaware of the existence of a Mr. Jaspar Brastaby. But long before the newspapers announced it, the news had found its way by diverse channels to some whom it did concern to a certain extent. The Russian Princess Taxidos was regaled with it by her maid the first thing in the morning. She was not usually amiable at that time of day, and her maid was glad to have a *bonne bouche* of the kind to offer her with her chocolate, which, when flavoured with a spice of excitement, had a wonderfully palliative effect on her temper. She had the flat immediately above Brastaby's at 48. "I heard the shot," she exclaimed delightedly, "and I thought, 'There's Jaspar shooting himself!'"

This profound reflection was repeated by the maid to Hills the liftman, who repeated it to the policeman in charge of the case, who made a note of it.

So stimulated, Princess Taxidos dressed at once and hastened to communicate the exciting news to Lady Cruxhaven, with whom she found Lady Ballard and Sarb close closeted. They had promised to help at a charity bazaar which was to be held

for the benefit of what it pleased them to describe as "The Diseased Ladies' Fund," and were engaged in devising something "thrilling" to wear and to do on the occasion. "Anything for a thrill," they were wont to say, and in the pursuit of thrills they were ready for anything. Each of the ladies supposed herself to have been the exclusive object of Brastaby's devotion. The Princess had valued him for purposes of display; she liked to have handsome men in her train. Red Ruin had appreciated his open-handedness; he had always a cheque-book in his pocket. To Lady Brandy and Soda he had come as a relief while her effervescent temperament was depressed by the loss of Col Drindon, and his attentions had been comforting as well as stimulating. She had the trying weakness of a modicum of heart which caused her to form attachments, so that a separation meant for her something of a wrench. The other two parted from their admirers as they did from their old gloves; they were only possible while they were fresh, and there were always plenty more on hand.

Lady Ballard and Sarb was overcome by the tragic news. Apart from her own loss she could still feel sorrow and pity for the man himself. Her real concern induced the other two to conform in appearance with a show of feeling proper to the occasion. The correctness of their manners could be admirable when circumstances called for correctness, and it was correct to be serious now. But what they felt was exhilaration. All appetites become vicious when over-indulged, and the appetite for excitement peculiarly so; ordinary sources soon pall, and a craving is eventually set up so urgent, that any means is snatched at to gratify it. Princess Taxidos had grown ghoulish in the pursuit, and Lady Cruxhaven was fast becoming so. Lady Ballard and Sarb was uncorrupted in this respect as yet, but horror has a fatal fascination, and the attitude of her friends charmed her as the snake charms a bird. Sensitively shrinking, and in spite of herself, she followed whither they led.

Their ghoulishness presently appeared. "What do they do at inquests?" Princess Taxidos asked abruptly.

"Sit on the body," Red Ruin rejoined, with a grimacing smile. "Fancy sitting on Jaspar's body!"

"How can you!" Lady Ballard and Sarb remonstrated, twisting a handkerchief, damp with tears, in her nervous fingers.

"It would be an experience," said Princess Taxidos reflectively.

"Fancy sitting on Jaspar's body!" Red Ruin repeated, smiling undisguisedly this time. "How exciting! Maud, you must come!"

Maud looked doubtful. "Poor Jaspar!" she sighed, wavering. "He would have liked us to go, perhaps. But should we see——?"

"See him? Why not? What are they, dead men? I have seen any number," Princess Taxidos rejoined with a shrug of her shoulders. From the way she spoke, it might have been supposed that dead men decorated her path in life. "I have seen men killed," she added, with a reminiscent smile.

"How thrilling!" Red Ruin exclaimed. "I'd rather not, though, I think. Poor Jaspar! To think that only yesterday—— And now! How *could* it have happened? Murder? Suicide? Accident?—which?"

"The truth will come out at the inquest," Princess Taxidos supposed, in pleasurable anticipation.

"If I were sure that we shouldn't see anything unpleasant——" Lady Ballard and Sarb ventured tentatively.

"I knew him so well," sighed Lady Cruxhaven, "a last look would be rather a comfort."

This suggested the propriety of a fond farewell to Lady Ballard and Sarb, and ended her wavering. She saw herself in black, scattering flowers on a bier covered with a purple pall, which effectually concealed all that was "unpleasant," yet at the same time allowed the object of her tenderness the gratification of being aware of this last, sad, delicate proof.

The notion of sitting on Jaspar's body appealed to Jaspar's associates generally, when it got abroad; that way of putting it was the kind of thing that caught on.

The inquest was held on a stormy day in a sombre hall in the basement of the hotel nearest to the scene of the tragedy. The narrow, barred windows, covered with wire-netting and level with the pavement, showed as grey streaks high up on the wall, and the flickering gas-jets, circled with iridescent haloes of mist, rather added to the gloom than dispersed it, by casting deep, diagonal shadows of the stuggy pillars which supported the low ceiling, across the hall at regular intervals. In the uncertain light the ceiling seemed to bulge inwards as if it were fain to crash down on the heads below, and it was as if the pillars wavered and strained in a supreme effort to frustrate

the fell intent. One after another of Brastaby's friends, as they descended the stairs, ejaculated "Hades!" And added that it was just like Jaspar to drag them all in after him, he was such a sociable fellow.

No public interest was being taken in the event, but the hall was crowded as if for a Society function. Lady Cruxhaven had captured Lord Terry de Beach, and was nestling as close up to him as the sitting accommodation permitted, which was closer than decorum sanctioned, but this was an exceptional occasion. She was in a state of subdued animation, and kept glancing round and recording her observations in remarks that were distinctly audible to the people behind and in front of her.

"I say, Jaspar's going to have a big party!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, don't!" remonstrated Lady Ballard and Sarb, who sat beside her nursing a basket of flowers and looking like a frightened young widow. She had encountered her husband coming in with Callowabbey, and, as usual, they had greeted each other with the cordiality of old friends who do not often meet.

Mr. Julius Harkles, whose respect for the deceased was made evident, though not vulgarly displayed, by a just adequate touch of mourning, was dancing attendance on Princess Taxidos, who had been obliged to consort with the witnesses, she having been summoned in consequence of what she had said when her maid added the startling news to her chocolate for her refreshment on the morning after the sad occurrence. Princess Taxidos under cross-examination held out a prospect of thrills that nobody would have missed.

"Here's the Duke of Castlefield Saye, all a-flutter," Red Ruin announced; "securing a place for the Winged Victory, doubtless."

Lord Terry looked down at her sideways. "What does your ladyship mean by that exactly?" he asked in an undertone, sarcastically.

"As if your lordship didn't know!" she laughed back.

The Duke sat beside Lord Terry, and immediately began to fidget.

"Expectin' anyone, Ninny?" the Terrier asked.

The Duke looked at him vaguely, at the same time taking out his penknife and opening it with the evident intention of operating on the back of the seat in front of him. The Terrier adroitly relieved him of the knife. "The enemy that attacked my Louis Quatorze," he said, putting it in his pocket. "I'm ashamed of you, Ninny. What are you doin' here anyway?"

to turn it out; that *had* happened. He, Cutler, cleared away in the dining-room first thing. (*He omitted to mention that what he cleared away was a supper for two, untouched. Ten years in Mr. Brastaby's service had taught him never to mention suppers for two, and habit triumphed.*) Having breakfasted himself, he prepared his master's tea, and took it to his bedroom. The bed had not been slept in. Again he was not surprised. Mr. Brastaby did not always sleep at his flat, and Cutler was seldom informed of his intentions. Next he went to the library. The gas was full on, and the first thing he saw was Mr. Brastaby asleep, as he supposed, in an armchair, with a dark-coloured shirt on. Approaching, he discovered that the dark colour was caused by the stain of blood. (*Sensation.*) Running out he called to Hills, the liftman, "There's been an accident!" Hills came running into the flat, and saw for himself that there'd been an accident. He sent Hills to fetch the police and a doctor. Questioned as to how his master had seemed during the day, he said, "As lively as usual."

Hills deposed that he had first encountered a policeman and told him that there had been an accident at 48. Then he roused a doctor and told him to hurry up because there'd been an accident at 48. (*The jury by this time had thoroughly grasped the fact that there had been "an accident" at* 48.) Questioned as to when he had last seen Mr. Brastaby alive, Hills said, "Just after Mr. Drindon left." A juryman insisted on making sure that it was after and not before Mr. Drindon had left.

(*"Do they mean to accuse the boy of murder!" Lord Terry growled. The supposition induced a bad fit of swearing, and he continued to rumble out oaths for some time.*) Hills, with his heckles up, said he should think it *was* after! Why, he let Mr. Drindon out himself, and Mr. Brastaby said he wanted to speak to him, but as he'd gone it didn't matter. (*Col's friends, having enjoyed an exciting prospect of Col as an accused, were disappointed.*) Questioned as to how Mr. Brastaby had seemed when he spoke to him, Hills declared that Mr. Brastaby was as lively and pleasant as usual.

Not being asked, Hills did not mention that just before going off duty he had noticed that Mr. Brastaby's hall door was wide open, and had shut it. Dependents and the poor live always on the defensive, and know the value of least said soonest mended. Long tongues never know what they may let themselves in for.

The Coroner's notes took time, and in the interval before the next witness was called, shafts of golden sunshine, glinting in, searched out all the unloveliness of the scene, but at the same time afforded pleasant distraction to idle minds by casting the shadows of passers-by on the wall opposite the windows, a moving frieze of legs and feet. Optimistic officials immediately turned out the gas, and necks were craned to watch them, as if the act had some important bearing on the inquiry.

The appearance of Mr. Colin Drindon, who was the next witness called, caused a flutter in the Court. Red Ruin's bell-like voice rang out as, clasping Lord Terry de Beach's arm, she exclaimed: "Is that really Col? Col dignified! Col with a presence! Why, the boy's grown-up!"

Lord Terry smiled down at her sideways, well-pleased. Praise of his boy never failed to please him, as Red Ruin well knew, and Lord Terry paid handsomely for his pleasures.

Mr. Drindon, sworn, stated that he had fallen in with Mr. Brastaby accidently during the afternoon, and had accepted an invitation to dine with him. After dinner they had gone to the library and had spent some time in examining Mr. Brastaby's collection of arms. Mr. Brastaby, noticing spots of rust on some of the weapons, said he must rub them up, and left them out on a table for the purpose. A juryman wanted to know if it were customary for gentlemen in the social position of the deceased to rub up their own weapons. Mr. Drindon replied that he shouldn't be surprised, if the gentleman were a good sportsman like Mr. Brastaby. Cutler, recalled, stated that Mr. Brastaby always saw to the weapons himself. He, Cutler, was never allowed to touch them.

The production of the revolver thrilled the onlookers. Mr. Drindon, asked if he recognised it as one of those Mr. Brastaby had shown him, after carefully examining it, answered, "No." (*The Duke grasped the back of the chair in front of him.*) "He was showing me new weapons with the latest improvements. This is an ordinary Colt. There's nothing to distinguish it from hundreds of others. Mr. Brastaby took down more weapons than I looked at. This might easily have been amongst them without my seeing it."

The weather caused another diversion here. The sun had withdrawn his golden gleams from the unhallowed scene, and now a deluge of rain threatened to shatter the windows. It might have been trying to get in for the purpose of washing out

the sins of society, but, if so, it soon abandoned the futile attempt. Darkness dropped down with the plump of rain, and nothing could be done until the gas was relighted. During the darkness it seemed to astonished jurors that there was horseplay in "High Society," but as the gas showed a surface of faces seriously intent, this was evidently a mistake.

The gas also showed two new characters, who appeared to have taken advantage of the darkness to make a sensational entry upon the scene, the one a detective in plain clothes, the other a vendor of arms who described himself as being "in a large way"—a statement contradicted so obviously by his small, frail body as to cause a laugh—a laugh which was quickly succeeded by the stillness of suppressed excitement.

Plain-clothes Detective was telling an unemphasised tale in a level tone which contrasted curiously with the sense of what he was saying. He seemed to attach so little importance to his words that the sensation which resulted when the onlookers grasped the fact that he had at the last moment succeeded in tracing the revolver by its number to the vendor whom he had brought into court with him, must have been a surprise to him—though it was nothing to the sensation which succeeded when the vendor, sworn, stated that he had registered the weapon as bought for the Duke of Castlefield Saye.

This contingency had not been unforeseen, yet Mr. Strangworth showed as much surprise as anybody, and the Duke exclaimed: "Must look into this."

"I should think so!" said Lord Terry de Beach.

Questioned as to "by" or "for" in the entry, the vendor asserted that it was distinctly "bought *for* the Duke," and produced his register in proof.

The Duke himself was now obviously "wanted." Plain-clothes Detective had done his best to find him, but had not succeeded. In this dilemma it was a relief to Coroner and jurors to find that the Duke was in Court and ready to present himself for examination.

The Duke took his place by the table as composedly as if he were about to sit down to a dinner to which he was indifferent, and he acknowledged the Coroner's compliments so absentmindedly that Lord Terry, who felt it important that he should be on the spot for once, shot the question at him in an exasperated undertone: "Where on earth *are* you, Ninny?"

"Oh, he's all right," Mr. Strangworth reassured him, himself

reassured. He had feared some show of the terrible anxiety which he knew was gnawing at the Duke's heart.

It appeared that his Grace could give no explanation of the circumstance of the revolver having been purchased in his name. All that he could say was that it was not his.

Could he have sent someone to get the weapon and forgotten the incident?

Might have. Did his shopping that way sometimes. Sent people to get themselves presents. On tick, don't you know. Slang. Must apologise. Like to choose their own presents. Ladies especially. (*"Be jabers! What would her Grace say to that!" The O'Haleron ejaculated. Red Ruin wrote the Duchess's familiar phrase on a slip of paper, "He is so very good and kind." Passed from hand to hand, it caused squirms of appreciation.*)

The vendor, recalled and questioned, had no definite recollection of the purchaser's appearance, except that he was tall, youngish, and gentlemanly-looking. (*"That clears the Duke," said Callowabbey, a sally which caused an explosion of unseemly mirth in his immediate neighbourhood.*) Continuing, the vendor said that the purchaser, when asked if he had a written order, produced a card of the Duke's on which was written, "Supply bearer with the best weapon you have, C. S."[1] He rather thought the purchaser kept the card. At all events it had disappeared. Purchaser was most particular in the choice of a weapon. He paid for it on the spot—(*which went to prove that it was not a present chosen for himself by the purchaser on the Duke's system of "tick"*).

His Grace, further questioned (with all due respect), said his cards must be lying about all over the place. Easy enough to get one. Didn't see the object though. Some young fool. Advertising his own importance. Or thought he'd make a better bargain for himself in that way. Certainly not Mr. Brastaby. "Fraudulent, don't you know, to use my card without my authority." He should suppose that Mr. Brastaby had bought the revolver second-hand.

Having launched this suggestion, he was ceremoniously bowed back to his seat.

"Deuced rum business," Lord Terry de Beach thought it.

"Deuced rum," repeated the Duke.

[1] It was subsequently that the restriction on the sale of firearms which would have made this transaction impossible, came into force.

The rum business of the revolver had wound the inquiry up from "exciting" to "most awfully thrilling." Hitherto there had merely been question of suicide or accidental death. Now murder was canvassed. Col's acquaintances assured each other that of course he could not have shot Burnished Brass; why should he? But the question was asked in a tone that implied a doubt if not a hope. Such a happening would be quite too-too as a thrill. And anyway the plot was thickening with surprises, and they wouldn't have missed sitting on Jaspar's body for gloves. The Marquis of Ballard and Sarb, in the impressive tone he affected on the rare occasions when his party had flogged him up to speak in another place, gave it as his opinion that the fraudulent buying of that shooting iron in the name of the most respectable of all the dukes—family man and all that sort of thing—queered the pitch considerably. The Earl of Callow-abbey, supporting the noble Marquis, allowed that it certainly looked off-side. Parties were formed and labelled "Murderers," "Suicides," and "Accidentalists." Lady Cruxhaven, asked on a scrap of paper which she was, signed herself, "Murderess," and passed the paper on to Lady Janet Brastaby. Lady Janet, scarlet with disgust, gave it to Mr. Strangworth. Mr. Strangworth considered it, leant forward so as to look Lady Cruxhaven in the face across the Duke and Lord Terry de Beach, then, significantly put the offensive thing in his pocket. Lady Cruxhaven gave him back for his look the smile for which she was famous, the smile that so perfectly matched her lovely voice. She had the daring of the devil, and would have smiled defiance from a scaffold on a mob howling for her blood. All the same she was uncomfortable within. Uncanny things were said of Mr. Strangworth, and she would have given anything to have that scrap of paper out of his waistcoast pocket. Its being there boded a lesson of some kind which she was not likely to forget. Chilled by the thought, she nestled closer to Lord Terry de Beach for protection.

"Ain't you hot enough?" he growled.

"Don't be a bear," she said.

"A bear with a bald head and a draught on it," he chuckled, pleased with the conceit.

The O'Haleron, asked if he could suggest a motive for murder, and taken unawares, rejoined without thinking—"*Cherchez la femme,*" and regretted it the moment the words were out. He was not for associating himself with "that crew" on an occa-

sion which his Irish heart and imagination and his religion alike, prompted him to respect; and he was the more repentant when he found that the effect of his words was to concentrate malicious attention on Lady Ballard and Sarb. Sitting rigidly upright, eyes and ears strained in an effort to follow the inquiry, her gipsy face drawn and colourless, her nervous fingers unconsciously picking the flowers in her lap to pieces, there was enough in her attitude to provoke suspicion, and The O'Haleron chivalrously cursed his tongue for a scurvy traitor that had injured a woman.

The jury meanwhile were examining the revolver—perfunctorily, even gingerly, so far as the majority were concerned; but one man put on his spectacles and did his duty by it lock, stock, and barrel. (*"Means to have his money's worth, that chap," Filmer Dabbs, junior, observed. Mr. Strangworth looked interested in the feet and legs of the passers-by outside. The Duke eased an agony of suspense by prodding a pattern on the back of Lady Janet Brastaby's chair in front of him with his tie-pin.*) "I understood," the juryman said at last, looking at the Coroner over his spectacles, "that the deceased Mr. Brastaby's Christian name was Jaspar." On being assured that the deceased Mr. Brastaby's Christian name was Jaspar, he asked: "Then 'ow does it 'appen that this 'ere weapon 'as engraved upon it the letters E. B.?"

Lady Janet had sat forward in her chair, eagerly attentive when the juryman first spoke; she now sank back as though the question had settled some doubt in her mind. Mr. Strangworth was aware of this movement. The Duke's nerveless hand ceased from troubling the back of the chair.

Mr. Drindon, recalled and appealed to, held out a steady hand for the weapon. (*His friends passed the word from one to the other that Col was all there. Paul MacAllen had accompanied him into Court, and the Sliver suggested that he had come to pray for him.*) Mr. Drindon saw the initials now that they were pointed out to him. He supposed they were the maker's or the seller's. Reference to the seller's name proved that they were not his, and the maker's name in full was on the weapon.

Lady Janet had turned to Mr. Strangworth, who after a hurried colloquy, wrote a note on a leaf of his pocketbook, and had it passed up to the Coroner. Immediately afterwards "The Lady Janet Brastaby" was called, and the onlookers held their breath while Mr. Strangworth conducted her to the table. The jury

were informed that Lady Janet Brastaby, widow, daughter of the Duke of Engleborough and aunt by marriage of the deceased Mr. Jaspar Brastaby, had come forward to give evidence. The jury were taken with the looks of the lady and her modest demeanour. She had put up her veil without being told to; there was clearly no nonsense about her. "Elroy," she said, "is the name which distinguishes my late husband's branch of the Brastaby family from the elder branch. My nephew always signed himself J. Elroy Brastaby." She could not say if he were in the habit of having things engraved with the initial E. alone, but as there was only room for two letters on the space on the revolver on which the initials had been placed, she thought it quite likely that he should have chosen to have the E. of the distinguishing family name instead of the J. of his Christian name.

But the conscientious juryman was not satisfied. He wished to know "'ow it was that Mr. Drindon, oo seemed to be on intimate terms with Mr. Brastaby, didn't know that the deceased gentleman signed his name 'J. Elroy'?"

"I didn't know," Col answered, unperturbed, "because he did not sign himself J. Elroy Brastaby when he wrote to me. (*High Society began to grin expectantly.*) All the letters I had from him were signed B. B. (*An explosion of mirth, inexplicable to Coroner and jury greeted this statement.*) Further questioned, Mr. Drindon explained that "B. B." stood for Burnished Brass. "Why 'Burnished Brass'?" the persistent juryman wanted to know. "Because of the extreme polish of his manners, and his [Brazen omitted] assurance," Col answered politely, whereupon another ripple of laughter relieved the proceedings. The persistent juryman inquired "If gents in 'Igh Society were in the habit of calling each other by suchlike names, which you might term nicknames;" but the Coroner ruled out the question as irrelevant.

Since the opening of the inquiry the elements had kept up an intrusive running accompaniment as if they meant to have their own say in the matter whatever might be toward. After the crackling hail which caused hunching of shoulders; after the flickering sunshine which relaxed the tension; after the plump of rain and the darkness which fostered momentary merry-makings of a kind not countenanced by daylight—came the wind claiming a permanent innings. Out in the open it rent the dark pall that curtained the sky and flung the pieces about,

so making the sun—which now gleamed through riven fragments and was anon blotted out by them—play a frivolous game of bo-peep with the earth. It sought entrance to the hall intermittently at first, as a faint moaning, such as one without and in pain might make. At times it came from above by the channel of the chimneys; at times it sounded at the door. Everybody knew that it was only the wind rising. Through the windows they could see pieces of paper whirling on the pavements and women's clothing blown about. Yet it got on their nerves, was importunate, so that they lent an ear to it in spite of themselves; were conscious of it, of tones in it as of a voice vainly striving to articulate and then wailing away in distress because it had failed to make itself understood. The onlookers in Court whispered one to another, "Do you hear the wind?" and were answered with a shiver, "Don't I hear the wind!" or irritably, "Do you think I'm deaf?"

An inaudible colloquy was going on at the Coroner's table which caused a pause in the proceedings, and there being nothing but the wind to distract them, the irritable nerves of High Society jumped to attention.

"It makes me feel all creepy, as if there were devils about," Lady Cruxhaven, in evident enjoyment of the sensation, confided to Lord Terry de Beach. "Maud Ballard and Sarb says it makes her feel wicked."

"I wonder what it would take to make you feel wicked—the bottomless pit yawning to engulf you, perhaps," he growled, looking askance at her out of the corner of his eye.

"I wonder!" she smiled back. "But I think I could make myself at home anywhere with you."

The implication clouded his brow.

But High Society began to be bored by the delay in the proceedings, and when that section of High Society begins to be bored it is apt to get out of hand. A scrap of paper on which was written, "Get on, old stick-in-the-mud!" and passed up from one to another until it reached the Coroner, was the first symptom. In wrath he crimsoned as he read it, and in wrath he spoke, when he had better have held his tongue. "Someone," he said, "has written on this paper 'Get on,' which is most improper."

"Improper" was enough. High Society rocked with laughter.

Laughter more obvious to the eye than to the ear, except in the case of such parasites as the Sliver and Filmer Dabbs,

junior, who, having in their blood none of those hereditary prejudices which make for restraint and beauty of manners, guffawed their ugliest. The jury, not being clear as to whether it was their duty to laugh or not, looked to the Coroner for guidance. He spoke, and then they knew where they were.

"If I knew who the persons are who are disgracing themselves and this Court, I should have them summarily ejected," he said sarcastically.

But catching defiance in the eyes of the dapper little Marquis of Ballard and Sarb, whose powerful torso made him look every inch "Burly Bill" when sitting down, he wisely abstained from making the attempt. The deceased's friends were too evidently of the kind who had qualified in the playing fields to sit tight when they chose to sit tight. Summarily ejecting the misbehavers with the Staff the Court had at its command would have been an impossibility should the misbehavers refuse to be ejected; and the scandal of a scrimmage on such an occasion, which would bring the newspapers down on him as inefficient, was to be avoided. He saved his dignity by calmly studying his notes, regardless of signs of the exasperation he was causing by the delay.

The respect the jurors had felt in the beginning for High Society began to wane, since High Society had apparently no respect for itself. What was left of their respect was quenched by the persistent one, whose native shrewdness, when it came to doing a deal with him, it was unwise to measure by his lingual peculiarities. When the laugh broke out, he took off the spectacles he used to inspect common objects near at hand, and put on a pair which enabled him to read human nature.

"These 'ere ain't 'Igh Society, titles or no titles," he confided to his *confrères,* as the result of his observations; "not the most of 'em by any manner of means. Ye've 'eard of Smart Society? Well, look at 'em! It's Smart Society we've got 'ere, and 'ats that the bettermer sort of haristocrat 'as nothing to do with. There's bad 'ats in every class, and there's no mistaking them, because they are bad 'ats. You may miss good men in a crowd, but if you keeps yer eyes open yer can allus put yer finger on a scallawag——"

Further revelations were cut short by the Coroner, who, satisfied that High Society's patience had been sufficiently tried for a lesson, now explained to the jury the cause of the delay in the proceedings. The doctor first summoned on the discovery

of the sad occurrence, it appeared, had made the autopsy with the assistance of an Eminent Surgeon who was an authority on bullet wounds. These gentlemen should have been in Court an hour ago, but Eminent Surgeon had, at the last moment, been commanded to attend a High Personage who had hurt his finger. (*High Personage's hurt finger was greeted with unmistakable demonstrations of delight, and order was only restored by the opportune arrival of Eminent Surgeon and his colleague. Their evidence had been eagerly looked forward to as likely to afford thrilling matter of interest.*)

Doctor first summoned testified that deceased was in the prime of life, in perfect health, every organ in his body sound. Certainly such a physical condition argued against the likelihood of morbid tendencies. (*"That knocks suicide on the head," said the Sliver.*)

Eminent Surgeon, having minutely described the nature of the wound, was asked by inquisitive juryman: "Would he die immediately?" "I should say not," was the answer. "About how long?" "Impossible to say exactly. He was a strong man." "Could anything have been done for him?" Eminent Surgeon glanced at the onlookers and hesitated. It is painful to harrow the feelings of distinguished mourners; but the question was pressed.

In view of the miracles wrought by modern surgery he was asked if he were prepared to assert that deceased would have had no chance for his life had help been at hand. Eminent Surgeon could not be expected to belittle the miracles performed by modern surgery. In view of them he brightened up, and, regardless of distinguished mourners' feelings, confessed himself not prepared to make any such assertion.

Then came the crucial question: "Could the wound have been the result of an accident?"

In all his experience Eminent Surgeon had never seen such a wound the result of an accident. (*General sensation, and* "Strangworth!" *from the Duke, a smothered cry for help.*)

Mr. Strangworth wrote on a leaf of his pocket-book, and beckoned to an official. Official delivered the leaf to the Coroner, who sent him back with a verbal message to Mr. Strangworth, who left his seat. Then it appeared that the eminent traveller and sportsman, Mr. Strangworth, had something to say on the possibility of such a wound being the result of an accident. (*"Good old Strangworth!" Callowabbey vociferated, and began*

to clap; but Ballard and Sarb, seated behind him, slammed him on the back of his head, and changed the direction of his thoughts. "Now for a jawbation," said Filmer Dabbs, junior, and folded his arms resignedly.)

The jurors congratulated themselves to a man on having been summoned on this occasion. Just to see Gregor Strangworth would have made the trouble of coming worth while, and when it came to hearing him speak as well, they felt themselves privileged. He did his best to entertain them. The didactic note would have made them think, therefore he played upon their emotions. With an unexampled flow of eloquence, he won them to the conviction that if ever a man knew what he was talking about, it was this big, blue-eyed Englishman, every inch a sportsman, and a gentleman too, mind you, respecting the law, and paying all due deference to those in authority.

"You never know what may happen with firearms," was his thesis,—in illustration of which he enumerated such a cloud of detail that no one could see the wood for the trees. Observations of his own; instances he presumed gentlemen of the jury to be well acquainted with of accidents which he minutely described all the same; theories which did not work out in practice, as he explained—making play the while with the revolver, now pointing it at his own breast, now aiming it at a juror with such sudden apparent intent that the gentleman winced, and then, in an effort to explain away the white feather, caused the other eleven to lose track of what the distinguished orator was driving at. But of one thing they were certain by the time he reached "the present inquiry," and that was that such a mishap as Brastaby's need surprise no man of the world with even only a superficial knowledge of the dangers to be apprehended in the careless handling of firearms. In fact, they could hear for themselves that right hand or left hand, this way or that—no matter how Mr. Strangworth held the weapon, click went the trigger or lock or whatever the thing was called that fired it, which was clear proof that you never knew what might happen.

Coming to the point in question, Mr. Strangworth courteously differed from Eminent Surgeon. He differed because he had had experience of a similar wound, the result of an accident. It happened when he was on the Amazon. A member of his party, a young Mexican, was carelessly handling a Colt—just such a weapon as this. (*Mr. Strangworth aimed the pièce de conviction at the jury, then threw it up and caught it, muzzle*

pointing with an audible click to his own chest.) Impossible to say why it went off, but off it went. Doctor, also a Mexican, rendered prompt assistance, but the unfortunate young fellow only survived the accident about twenty minutes.

The Coroner (*prompted by Eminent Surgeon*) asked what reason Mr. Strangworth had to suppose that the wound in the case he described was identical with the one they were discussing.

"The Greaser Doctor, an intelligent fellow, always on the lookout for a chance to improve his knowledge of his profession, insisted on making a post-mortem examination," Mr. Strangworth said. "I was present at the post-mortem."

He gave the details in language as impressively pedantic as Eminent Surgeon's. They coincided with the details already before the Court in the case of the deceased Mr. Brastaby, and forced the conclusion upon everybody that if such an accident had happened once it might reasonably be expected to happen again.

The supposition of murder had to be gone into for form's sake, but there was not a tittle of evidence in support of it. The deceased was not known to have an enemy in the world; there was no disorder in the apartment in which the body was found, as, presumably, there would have been had a quarrel taken place there; nor could robbery be alleged as a motive, since not one of the many valuable things lying loose about the flat was missing.

There remained the question of suicide, and the Princess Taxidos was called.

She was wearing heavy black furs over a deep red dress, a striking contrast; and in manner as well as appearance she was striking as she negligently approached the table—strikingly insolent. Before they had done with her honest jurymen conceived a life-long prejudice against foreign hussies, princesses or no princesses; for just look at the difference between her gettings-on and the modest demeanour of that gentle, high-bred English lady! Meaning Lady Janet Brastaby, and England for ever!

Asked, considerately, if she would like a chair, she first glanced at the table as if the idea of sitting on it had crossed her mind, and then said, "No," shortly. Certainly, her red and black effect was better calculated for display standing than sitting. With that off-hand "No," she turned her back on the

Coroner and looked out acquaintances in the audience, nonchalantly. Requested peremptorily to be good enough to pay attention, she turned on Authority with elevated eyebrows. "Don't speak to me in that irritable tone, dear sir," she said suavely; "I am not your poor wife." (*"She's out for fun," the word went round, and there was a general quickening of attention, and brightening, in anticipation of a comic interlude.*)

It appeared that she had heard a shot on the night of the fatal occurrence. She thought, "There's Jaspar shooting himself." What did she do? Turned over and went to sleep. What else could she do? She was warm in bed, and it was a cold night. (*A ripple of laughter, which was with difficulty suppressed, rewarded this characteristic touch.*)

Asked if her exclamation, "There's Jaspar shooting himself!" meant that she had reason to think that Mr. Brastaby intended to commit suicide and supposed that he had done so, she being "An Accidentalist," answered in the interest of her own bets. "No. Last man in the world. But if you'd seen him handling firearms you would have expected him to shoot himself sooner or later." Yes, she meant that he handled firearms carelessly. Further questioned, she condemned the notion of his having committed suicide. "He was too jolly fond of life, and knew too jolly well how to live, to do anything so ridiculous," she said. (*The outbursts of merriment which greeted her every callous answer satisfied her, at the conclusion of her examination, that she had scored a success as a witness.*)

The Coroner, in his summing up, informed the jury that it was not the province of that Court to go into the question of how the revolver came, in the first instance, to be fraudulently purchased in the name of his Grace the Duke of Castlefield Saye. That was a matter for the police to inquire into, and doubtless his Grace would find them prepared to give their best attention to the subject. It sufficed for this inquiry that the revolver had come into Mr. Brastaby's possession. He might have bought it second-hand, or it might have been a gift; but clearly it was his, otherwise he would not have had his initials engraved upon it.

At the conclusion of the Coroner's elaborate address, the jury found themselves again grasping the fact that there had been an accident at 48. No need for them to retire. In whispered consultation, and borrowing the foreign hussy's expression as

convincing though no credit to her, they unanimously agreed that a man of ample means, without embarrassments of any kind, in perfect health, in High Society, with crowds of distinguished friends, as witness the attendance in Court, would jolly well not have been so ridiculous as to take his own life. "Death by Misadventure," that was the ticket, with a rider expressive of sincere sympathy with the family and friends of the deceased.

"The lawless science of the law" was satisfied with the verdict, and so were the consciences of certain participators in the inquiry, who, with the full facts of the case in their possession, held that in equity "Death by Misadventure" was essentially the right conclusion.

4

As if it owed them a grudge the blustrous wind attacked Jaspar's acquaintances as they emerged from the gloomy basement in which they had enjoyed the grisly pleasure of sitting on Jaspar's body, and put them to as much inconvenience as it could. It battered their bodies, it slapped their faces, it disordered their dress, it drew water from their eyes which looked like tears but was only a surface drainage; it howled adjurations in their ears which might have won them to loathe their own ugliness could they but have understood that it meant anything but damned bad weather. Above the houses torn cloud and flying cloud-rack betokened the force of the gale, and the Duke's heart quailed at the thought of one at that moment, perhaps, in peril on the sea. He saw his great white yacht, the *Iphegenia,* mounting the mountainous waves like a cork. . . . But, yes! Like a cork. The worn simile was welcome as the finest figure of speech to a poet. A cork must weather a gale; that was reassuring.

"You look all to pieces," said Lord Terry de Beach as they gained the pavement. "Let me see you home."

The Duke absently declined the proffered attention. He expected a friend.

"Why, blast you, Ninny!" the irascible Terrier exclaimed. "Ain't I a friend?"

The Duke looked at him with troubled eyes, vaguely, and passed on,—which wasn't like Ninny, wasn't like Ninny at all.

Ninny could be ducal on occasion; he could put Presumption in its place with the twitch of an eyebrow, and you had to respect his reticence or make a cad of yourself,—but when had Ninny, in his normal state, ever slighted the friendliness of a friend?

The Terrier stood rooted to the spot, cogitating, while blustrous gusts unheeded took liberties with him, flapped his coat tails about, snatched at his hat. The humoresque old reprobate had strong attachments, and the heart sees clearer than the head. Ninny was not himself, that was evident; but why? Why had he come with this crowd at all? It wasn't like him. He didn't care a rap for Brastaby; probably had never spoken to him in his life. That rum business of the revolver was sprung upon him too, so it couldn't have been that; and it was a trumpery incident anyway; the sort of thing to be treated ducally; not likely to cost Ninny a second thought. Lord Terry was puzzled. He was also blamed and the reverse of blessed—an unsafe condition which left his mind open to attacks from the Evil One. Red Ruin's malicious allusion to the Winged Victory recurred to him. It was highly distasteful. There was nothing in the implication that Lord Terry himself would have felt in honour bound to eschew; but he was a poor sinner to be saved, and if men like Ninny lied—lived lies—where would the ten righteous be found to avert the sinner's doom? And it was not like Ninny, no! Yet possibly—for you never can tell.

But in the case of a man with all Ninny's responsibilities on his shoulders, a man who'd be such a loss to his country, a free lance, ready to aim at evils regardless; and just now with all this damned puritan cant about—what a risk! It would take his faithful old Terrier all his time——

But before his faithful old Terrier could formulate an oath of allegiance, a new direction was given to his thoughts by the wind, which managed at last to get a good grip of his hat, and whirled it away gleefully down the street.

"Harkles!" he shouted.

Mr. Harkles had been unceremoniously shunted by Princess Taxidos when she had done with him, and was now again ready to serve his patron. The wind was blowing the hat along in the mud like a hoop. "Run!" said Lord Terry peremptorily.

And Harkles Superbus ran.

Princess Taxidos was not to be baulked of the gratification

of her ghoulish interest in corpses. The moment the Court rose she hurried Lady Cruxhaven and the half-reluctant Lady Ballard and Sarb from the hotel by a back entrance which brought them immediately to 48: "For a last fond look," she said. "You can kiss him for his mother, Maud."

"Oh, don't!" Maud remonstrated, but the bait of the last fond look was irresistible.

Cutler, forewarned, let the ladies in. His manner, without affectation, was decently appropriate. He was feeling the loss of a good master and a comfortable home. Sole charge had been deputed to him, and he had seen to everything as carefully as if his master were likely to return at any moment and call him to account. He had done for the flat as he did when Brastaby went out of town, "put it in curl-papers," as he would have said; but he had shown his respect for the dead by covering up everything in the library with fine linen, instead of the usual dingy dust-sheets. Chairs and tables were crowded together at the end of the room, the coffin stood on trestles in the middle. Lady Cruxhaven's lively wit seized instantly on the effect: "It looks as if a corpse had taken advantage of the absence of the owner to intrude," she said.

Wreaths in profusion perfumed the room, but also—

> *. . . . the smell of death*
> *Came reeking from those spicy bowers,*
> *And man, the sacrifice of man,*
> *Mingled his taint with every breath*
> *Upwafted by the innocent flowers.*

"Your Highness is just in time," Cutler said as he showed them in. "He's not screwed down."

"Phew! We're only just in time for more reasons than one," Princess Taxidos remarked.

Cutler removed the coffin-lid and uncovered the face reluctantly, but her Highness was not to be gainsaid. He awaited their next pleasure with outward respect but inward reprobation. The coffin-lid, which he held with one end resting on the ground as if matching its height with his own, towered above his head grotesquely. The three ladies were well-known to him. Their "goings-on" had always disgusted him, and he hoped now that they'd get more for their trouble than they'd bargained for. As

respected Lady Ballard and Sarb, from whose gipsy face the colour ebbed, leaving it ashen grey, he was satisfied. Lady Cruxhaven merely made a passing grimace. Princess Taxidos smiled sardonically. "Fancy that Jaspar!" she said. "What a waste of a man!"

In every sense of the word she spoke truly.

The autopsy had disturbed the marble serenity of death. The eyes were unclosed; between the lips of the down-drawn mouth the white teeth gleamed as when an angry dog snarls. A fly, alighting on the tip of the nose, ludicrous in effect, robbed the face of what dignity remained to it, and it was as if the dead man resented the humiliation; was enraged at his own repulsiveness.

Cutler, in brushing the fly away, accidentally exposed a waxen hand loosely holding a small shabby Bible. It was a cheap copy, Cutler's own, and the only symbol of hope in the sumptuous flat. He had secretly placed it in the helpless hand, with heaven knows what feeling of propriety or desire to serve—a kindly feeling anyway.

A well-worn Bible was the last thing either of the ladies would have expected to find in Brastaby's possession.

"How funny men are!" Princess Taxidos exclaimed amusedly. "You never know what they may be up to!"

"Oh, one might easily guess what Jaspar was up to when he searched the scriptures," Lady Cruxhaven observed. "There are passages——!" She cast up her eyes, then added, drawing in her breath with a hissing sound—"I don't call him beautiful in death!"

"He might have been fixed up more impressively," Princess Taxidos suggested, thinking of candles and crucifix, kneeling nun and praying priest; the solemn symbols and reverence with which the dead are dignified by faith. "But you English are so practical! When there is nothing more to be done for a man or a dog, you put them away with the least fuss possible."

Red Ruin had a retort to this jibe, but before she could utter it, a glance at Lady Ballard and Sarb's grey face caused Cutler to let the coffin-lid fall clattering to the ground and spring to her assistance.

Never again would she be able to recall Jaspar's image or think of him without a shudder. But she had one consolation on which she afterwards congratulated herself. She was able to get home before she was actually sick.

When Cutler returned from seeing her off, he found the other two ladies talking to each other pleasantly across the coffin. Without consulting them, he covered the face, and replaced the lid. But as they paid no attention to this hint, he asked: "Will your Highness take tea?"

"Here?" said her Highness, eyeing the coffin as a possible table. "It would be original," she decided.

But Lady Cruxhaven caught a meaning glint in the man's eye which was not in keeping with the outward show of respect in his attitude, and might portend unpleasant developments. "Don't be horrid!" she conceded to the threat, addressing the Princess. "*I* must go."

But before they separated to go their several ways, bent on the next amusement, the two ladies unconcernedly turned over the cards on the various wreaths to see who had sent them, and found entertainment in the wording of some of the inscriptions.

"It isn't much wonder you're there, these being your friends!" Cutler might have apostrophised his late master in his coffin after they had gone, had he known just a little more. As it was he gave vent to his feelings pityingly with a heart-felt, *"Poor chap!"*

Lady Cruxhaven's way brought her skimming across the wet pavement to Lord Terry de Beach, who had been detained on the spot by various acquaintances. She looked as smilingly unruffled as if she had just been turned out by her maid, satisfied with herself. Her recent experience had but served to freshen her.

"I'm sad," she said untruthfully, clasping his arm with both hands. "Dear Lord Terry, take me home and comfort me!"

"Comfort you," he repeated, hesitating in view of her limpid eyes and splendid ruddy hair; but something said to him "Satan's Shepherdess," and he cast temptation aside. "No," he said curtly, "I'm not for 'Red-Ruin-and-the-Breaking-up-of-Laws' to-day, thank you. Where's your carriage?"

He tucked her up in it, and summarily dismissed her; then, finding the faithful Harkles at his elbow again, he vented his humour on him.

"Pitch can't touch you without defiling you," he exclaimed, referring to Red Ruin. "I must wash and be clean. Where's my blasted carriage? Hurry it up, you—*clothes-horse*—will you? We'll read about they that go down in the depths or

come up out of them, or some other damned consoling business of that kind——"

He broke off to salute Lady Janet, who had come up abreast of him from behind with Mr. Strangworth. Hat in hand and bowing low, he said earnestly, "May I express my most sincere sympathy, Lady Janet?"

"Thank you, you are always kind," she paused to rejoin, and then passed on.

"If all women were like Janet Brastaby," Lord Terry growled, "we men would be a precious sight different lot. It's the damned women make fuel of us for hell-fire, Harkles."

"In your case, sir, they have not succeeded," the long-suffering Julius magnanimously encouraged him.

"Eh? D'ye think not? I don't know!" Lord Terry answered, hope fighting fear; but fear gained the day, and he relapsed into a state of deep dejection.

Mr. Strangworth had waited in the hotel with Lady Janet to give the crowd time to disperse, and was now seeing her home by a circuitous route. After the mephitic atmosphere of the crowded Court they found the wintery sunshine, which was enlivening the windy, wet streets as health returning enlivens the sick, gratefully restorative, and were tempted to prolong their walk. Lady Janet, whose indignation had waxed as she reviewed the doings in Court, and who had broken off in the middle of a tirade to acknowledge Lord Terry de Beach's courtesy, now resumed explosively: "And, oh, did you see them! Did you know they were *betting!* Did you hear that horrible Cruxhaven woman behind me! And Princess Taxidos got up for effect, scoring admiration by her insolence! They came for the pleasure of it; to make a Roman holiday. Poor Jaspar! These were his friends! Oh, we are all rotten! rotten! rotten!"

"No, we are not," Mr. Strangworth quietly contradicted her. "Our national life is vigorously rooted in the soil and sound enough. In all states and in all classes there is an undertone of corruption, but it never drags the whole community under. On the contrary, it develops the national moral muscle, and strengthens it by provoking the majority to determined resistance. The wrong-doers in our class are conspicuous, that's why we hear so much about their misdeeds, but a census of averages would be favourable to them."

"I am glad you think so," she answered drily.

They walked a little way in silence, then she burst out again: "Heaven knows I've not had the kindliest feelings for Jaspar, but—oh, poor fellow! Surely something worth while might have been made of him if he hadn't been born among us idle hands whom the devil is always on the lookout to supply with some mischief still to do. He was such a gallant boy! So handsome! And a good son! If only his mother had lived! You remember her? It was not until after her death that he went to pieces. . . . And to die like that! To be shot like a dog, and—*and to deserve it!*"

Their eyes met, hers significant, his inquiring; but he said nothing.

"I am glad I was there to help you to-day," she added. "You and Colin and the Duke."

He stopped short, then looked about him vaguely. "Oh, I see! We're all right," he said, as if he had supposed that they had lost their way.

"Of course," she proceeded, looking straight ahead, "it would be impossible now to trace obscure Mexicans who were on the Amazon years ago."

He fell out of step and changed feet.

"When an habitually truthful man lies like a politician, and a man who specialises in facts suddenly reveals himself a master of fiction, what are we to think?" she asked musingly.

He saw that there was nothing for it but the accusing excuse. "That there must be some reason to account——" he said.

"Or excuse to justify," she suggested.

"A man who feels that a diversion from verbal accuracy besmirches his honour, when he does—er—deviate——" he began.

"Must have done so altruistically, in a spirit of self-sacrifice," she filled in the pause, "for the purpose of helping someone out of a difficulty. It is conceivable that the end might justify the means, and honour be honourably compromised if no one were injured—if the ends of justice were not thwarted."

"Might not his one excuse be that by no other means could injustice be averted?"

She was silent.

"There are cases which make it the duty of a chivalrous man to save a woman by every means in his power from the clutches of the law as it may be administered," Mr. Strangworth continued. "Think of any *cause célèbre* that you like; what hap-

pens to the woman witness then? Scarcely a lawyer among them is gentleman enough to refrain from woman-baiting when he has a chance to play to the gallery through the jurors, and advertise himself. I've seen them at it, torturing women in the witness-box; and even when acquitted the woman is besmirched —is that justice? Low, vulgar-minded cowards! I'd like to kick them all, and I'd not wear the boots again that had served the purpose. Chivalry to women! It isn't skin-deep. Look at our man-made laws! Think of the Court cleared of women in certain cases, and a poor little trembling girl, already half dead of the horrors of one outrage at the hands of man, delivered over to the lions of the law to be torn to pieces by questions that it would have been torture to be asked by her mother; with an audience of prurient men and boys privileged to gloat.— Ends of justice? Ends of devilry," he broke off. "Oh, damn the law! . . . on occasion," he added parenthetically.

"With all my heart," said Lady Janet. "I repeat, I am glad that I was there to-day to be a help to you and Colin and the Duke."

"What precisely do you mean by that?" he asked.

They had reached her door and she took out her latchkey, and toyed with it while she spoke. "I have to confess to 'verbal inaccuracy' myself," she said. "I had a premonition that Jaspar would brew trouble for himself in a certain quarter. I did not believe the initials on the revolver stood for Elroy Brastaby."

He swept a piece of orange-peel from the footpath with his stick.

"The verdict would have been suicide, I suppose, if you had not spoken," she added.

"The odium of suicide would have been cast on an innocent man if I had not spoken," he replied.

"And you were out to secure justice to everybody, even Jaspar, at no matter what cost! Justice, it seems, is expensive in this land of the brave and free, and law, which can be paid for in filthy lucre, is comparatively cheap. I saw your point——"

"And won it for us," he thanked her.

"If you three are satisfied, I am," she said.

"The verdict was essentially correct," he assured her.

"It was the cost I was thinking of," she replied. "I am content to have paid my share."

"You did well," he said. "I honour the sacrifice, especially as you had no knowledge of the circumstances to make it easy for you."

"Knowledge of the circumstances would have made it easy for me then?" she answered tentatively. "But I ask no questions."

"Look at your own door," he suggested.

She looked up at it, puzzled. "I see nothing——" she was beginning. "Oh, the number! It was lately changed—it was 48." It came to her in a flash. "And 48 fell to Jaspar's house!"

They looked in each other's faces, he waiting, she thinking rapidly. *"Tricked!"* burst from her at last.

He nodded.

She uttered a long piteous "Oh—h—h!" Then, recovering herself, said gently: "Thank you for trusting me so far. More anon, perhaps?"

Again he nodded.

No, he thanked her, he would not come in to-day.

From the top of the steps she called him back.

"Gregor," she said, "I shall blackmail you. I shall blackmail you for love."

"Love, Janet? Yes, love!" he answered eagerly, his brow clearing. "Love will prevail! Don't think. Don't judge. Feel. Feel for your fellow-creatures; feel sorry for them all the time. You cannot love each individual one; but there is never a one that you cannot pity—and pity, you know, is akin——"

With that, and waving his hat, the simple, great man went his way, unenlightened even by her heightened colour.

Paling, she watched him out of sight, and was not aware of Col Drindon saluting her as he passed with Paul MacAllen Ray.

Col was talking excitedly. "Stay with me, Paul," he was saying, "stay with me! I must talk and talk and talk, or something will happen."

Paul, undisturbed, patiently accompanied him to his flat. Col's humours were all fantastic.

He opened the door with his latch-key, and called George Bowden.

The world was ousted now from the once luxurious abode. Tapestry, curtains, carpets, *bibelots,* secular pictures, and all that ministers to fleshly lusts that war against the soul, had

given place to the ascetic monastic severity of cold polished floors, whitewashed walls, sacred symbols, and such solid furniture as was only barely needful. Vanity had been banished, yet vexation of spirit remained.

George Bowden came at the call to what now looked like a refectory. He stood just inside the door waiting for orders, stolidly respectful, ready for any emergency.

Col flung his arms about, ran his fingers up through his thick, fair hair till it stood on end. "The times are out of joint, George Bowden," he exclaimed. "What shall we do? What shall we do?"

"Down on our knees and pray, sir," George Bowden recommended, the words issuing from his lips unemotionally, as from a machine. "We 'ave 'Is promise that when two or three are gathered together in My name——"

"Right you are, down on our knees," Col interrupted, suiting the action to the word. "You pray for us, Bowden. Tell the Lord what we think of ourselves; tell Him what to think of us in His mercy; tell Him what we are relying on Him to do for us."

George Bowden, nonconformist, joyfully came to life at that, and Heaven was well, if curiously, informed on all three points by the time he had done with them.

CHAPTER VI

THAT POOR SHIP IN SORROW

Blow to-day, and blow to-morrow,
Blow, boys, blow!
And blow for that poor ship in sorrow,
Blow, boys, jolly boys, blow!

—AMERICAN CHANTY.

1

IMMEDIATELY after the inquest, Lord Terry de Beach disappeared from London without due notice given to his Julius, who was hurt. No one knew what had become of the Terrier, except, of course, his beloved boy, Col Drindon, who refused to be drawn. Invitations to house-parties had been infrequent this

winter, and Mr. Harkles was feeling the need of a change. He would have been glad of a little hunting, or shooting, or even of the office of *cicebeo* to one of his entertaining (on a lavish scale) county lady friends; but Julius Caesar as a joke was stale, and as none of them were in the kind of difficulty he was good at helping them out of, they had all dropped him till next time—a depressing proof of what you may expect from women in the way of ingratitude. It was therefore both with relief and pleasure that at last he received a letter from Lord Terry, written on board his yacht, the *Daydawn*. He was cruising about, he said, and if Mr. Harkles chose to join the yacht immediately at Marseilles, he could have a berth. Mr. Harkles was a good sailor. Indeed, without sea legs, his equipment for his business in life, the securing by his accomplishments of a good seat at every plentiful board and at all great social functions, would have been incomplete. The chance offered him by Lord Terry de Beach was one to be jumped at, and Mr. Harkles jumped at it as a hungry dog jumps at a bone, in high hope, taking the quality of the bone for granted. What mattered it to Mr. Harkles that the Terrier's manner of tossing the invitation at him was about the same in words as the act of tossing a bone to a dog! Magnanimous Harkles was for calling the faults of his noble friend mere oddities when the one in question was balanced by the chance of a cruise on summer seas in one of the finest yachts afloat, a yacht, too, famed for its social adventures. Besides, who was to know that the favour had not been gilt with cordial courtesy? Harkles prided himself on being able to hold his tongue as well as he could wag it, to his own advantage. The wagging of it had more than once been rendered necessary by the "oddities" of his noble friend—as on a recent occasion at the Land and Leisure Club, when his good-nature, misinterpreted as subserviency, had attracted unpleasant attention. The Terrier had just given him a "nasty one" before them all, and gone off, leaving him in the lurch.

"I can't think what sort of machinery a man has inside him to work him, who stands that sort of thing," Callowabbey openly jibed.

"I stand it because I understand it," Mr. Harkles replied with dignity. If the Sliver had said as much, Mr. Harkles would have "given him beans," but it is always worth while for a Harkles to explain to an earl. "He's a sick man, that's the fair thing to think of him. Only a fool takes a sick man's

nastiness seriously. A human being makes allowances. A human being knows what the sick man will think of himself when he gets on his legs again, and can see things from a reasonable, healthy point of view. He'll be ashamed of himself then and for making amends, though no decent chap would owe him a grudge."

Mr. Harkles seemed to be rolling each word in the milk of human kindness, so rounded were the tones in which he delivered this utterance.

"Why doesn't he hit out at Col?" Ballard and Sarb asked the smoke of his cigarette.

"Col isn't his nurse," said Mr. Harkles, seizing the opportunity to instate himself by implication in an office which never fails to reflect credit on the holder. "It's on his nurse that a patient vents his tantrums. He has to be disciplined, and he knows it's his only chance, so he clings to his nurse, but he hates the discipline; it irritates him, and so he hits out. But it's not the nurse he hits out at, it's the discipline, and a nurse who is a human being knows that and makes allowances."

"So you are Lord Terry de Beach's nurse!" Lord Ballard and Sarb observed to the ceiling.

"I'm the man he clings to," Mr. Harkles rejoined with spirit, and nobody could deny it. "And I'm the one who makes no bones about corking up the bottle when it's necessary."

He wisely did not wait to have this point conceded. It would have been disputed when he had gone if the Sliver had not diverted their attention by asking with a snigger: "Are we to understand that Harkles is by way of thinking himself a human being?"

"Why not?" The O'Haleron asked lazily. "Sure ye niver can tell what a Clothes-horse is thinking of himself in his heart——" which side-tracked Mr. Harkles. For a word was enough at any time to alter the points at the Land and Leisure Club, and turn a discussion off onto another line. Their talk was a train that was forever being shunted backwards and forwards, and never got far away in any one direction, never arrived at a terminus. It passed now from a clothes-horse's heart to the consideration of a new ballet-dancer's calves, to which Lord Ballard and Sarb took exception, as being too high.

Mr. Harkles flew to Marseilles on the wings of the *Train de Luxe*. He reached the yacht at a preposterously early hour,

and found no one up but a taciturn steward, who received him with such offers of creature comforts as were acceptable under the circumstances. Hot rolls and delicious coffee made Mr. Harkles feel that he was abroad. The English traveller, after a tedious journey, satisfying his appetite with food which hunger vouches for as the best he ever tasted, and further elated by the strangeness of his surroundings and the sense of adventure, is prone to pity his compatriots humdrumming it at home. Pity was not a weakness of Mr. Harkles's, but he thought of acquaintances he had left behind suffering in the cold, and, contrasting his privileges with their disabilities, looked down on them. When the taciturn steward while waiting on him did utter a word it was in an undertone, and he nipped about the saloon on tiptoe,—satisfactory evidence to Mr. Harkles that behind those shining doors were interesting fellow-voyagers whose beauty-sleep must on no account be disturbed. Mr. Harkles smiled round at the shining doors. He would have kissed his hand to them had he been alone, so glad was his heart. As it was, he silently sent his love to the ladies, and wondered who the devil the men might prove to be—not that blasted Strangworth, he hoped. But he asked no questions. Harkles Superbus was not by way of questioning a menial—just then. He was for reposing on pleasurable anticipations and avoiding subject-matter for thought. The fact that one of the best staterooms had been allotted to him for his sole use gave him reason to suppose that he was in for pleasant surprises. He had expected to be doubled up with some other man, and great was his content. It seemed that the Terrier had considered him kindly for once, which just showed what a fool he, Mr. Harkles, would have been to take offence at his bone-to-a-dog sort of offer of a cruise. Oh, Harkles knew what was what! He knew when to make allowances for the foibles of a noble friend! He was wise to wait patiently on the sick man's caprices, with his recovery in view, and the expiatory season of making amends.

Upon this satisfactory reflection Mr. Harkles locked his cabin-door and sought repose, as a duty to the ladies, whose right it would be to find him at his best when he shone out upon them later in the day. After the hurry of his departure and the fatigue of the journey, he required sleep. A bustle on deck disturbed him for awhile. He was conscious of the first few revolutions of the propeller, and knew that they were off—where

to? But what did it matter! Mr. Harkles appreciated the beauties of nature as an addition to the luxuries of life, a setting which enhanced them as table decorations enhance the enjoyment of good food; but travelling simply for the sake of living in lovely surroundings had no charm for him. When he thought of the various places he had visited, it was the party he had accompanied that he recollected accurately; the men and the women and their sayings and doings, and the quality of the food and wine. The grandest scenery made no more impression upon him than it would on a short-sighted man who had lost his glasses and could only see things dimly looming, as in a mist. So now, covered up warmly on the restfullest springs in a swing-cot, with every luxury that wealth and taste could provide within sight in his cabin and within reach just beyond; and in company with a picked few of his own idea of "the best people," he naturally felt that it did not matter where they went, so long as it was not to the bottom; and of that he had no fear on a pleasure cruise, hugging the land from port to port, and with the weather watched and waited on for the sake of the ladies, whom Lord Terry de Beach as host on his yacht never subjected to qualms of sea-sickness if care could prevent it. That, and the liveliness for which his yachting parties were celebrated, gave them their *cachet*. Duchesses scrambled for invitations, it was said, and it was inevitable that Mr. Harkles should feel himself blessed in the possession of that for which duchesses scrambled. He had all the right clothes, too,—not too yachty, you know; he never made a vulgar mistake of that kind,—and he had brought his tambourine, the only instrument he played, but he played it well; and what an instrument for the occasion! Conviviality flowed from it. Someone was sure to have a guitar to thrum, and that and a tap or two on the tambourine would tickle a dancer's feet, a skirt dancer—Lady Brandy and Soda, for choice; she was likely to be on board. And she knew the trick. She could make 'em "like gods together, careless of mankind"—in five minutes.

Mr. Harkles hugged himself in his berth. Had he not reason to anticipate a real good time! He decided to get up for lunch. Then he turned over. The first few jerky revolutions of the propeller had settled down to a steady clacketty-clack, and the trampling overhead had ceased. He thought how jolly comfortable he was, cradled in his cot by the gentle swaying of the boat. They were certainly off, and on a quiet sea—Med-

iterranean Sea—Blue Danube—no, *Côte d'Azure*, sunshine, *chef* —Terry's *chef*. . . . What would there be for breakfast—no, lunch? . . . But Mr. Harkles was asleep before he had made out a menu, and he slept long.

When, after a most careful toilet, at last he appeared upon deck, only his host, alas! happened to be there to applaud.

They were well out to sea by that time, a gently heaving summer sea, iridescent as molten metal in the sunshine. Lord Terry, in a suit of nautical blue that had seen some service, stood under the awning aft, with a pair of binoculars in his hand. He looked the debonair Harkles over as he emerged from below, looked at his white-crowned yachting-cap, at his faultless blue serge coat, at his speckless white duck trousers and neat shoes, as if the sight of such spruceness saddened him. He greeted his Julius gloomily with "So there you are!" and shook his head.

"Nobody up but me!" Mr. Harkles exclaimed. "I thought I was late."

Unfortunately for Mr. Harkles, a man cannot esteem himself above everybody else without showing it occasionally to his own disadvantage. The world has set up a Selfless Man for its ideal, and individuals, approving the ideal for quite selfish reasons, lay it upon others as the right thing to be. If you are unselfish, you see, I shall benefit. Mr. Harkles had, in the enjoyment of himself, unwittingly lapsed from the ideal and given excuse for a snub, which Lord Terry seized upon promptly. "Am I nobody?" he snapped.

"Oh, on the contrary, to me you are everybody," Mr. Harkles gushed, vainly assuming heartiness to cover his slip.

"Well, I am everybody for once, unless you've suddenly become somebody yourself," Lord Terry said nastily. "And you are late."

"I'm accustomed to be called," Mr. Harkles apologised. "I get up on chocolate," he added, to turn the tables with a complaint. "But it was too late to ask for it when I awoke. It would have spoilt my lunch."

"All you'd have got wouldn't have spoiled your lunch," Lord Terry answered darkly. "Beastly self-indulgence, chocolate in bed. Chocolate to get up on, good Lord! How's that for a man!"

Mr. Harkles turned cold. The Terrier in a black mood, the deserted deck, not a sign in veil or parasol or glove or scarf or

other dainty feminine belonging left lying about, that there were ladyships on board; nor a single comfortable deckchair to show that they were expected—did it mean——? Could it be——? Yes, it was! He saw it in the Terrier's boiled-gooseberry, grey, goggle eyes (so he inwardly anathematised them); watchful eyes, curious to see how he took it. They two were shut up in the yacht, far out at sea, alone together.

And, furthermore, the Terrier being satisfied with the effect of his *coup*, and turning to survey the damnation blue sea through his binoculars, turning to conceal a smile, Mr. Harkles was sure—left something, hitherto concealed behind him, exposed on a bench, something from which Mr. Harkles recoiled as though it had threatened him physically; a black shabby something, a well-known instrument of torture from which he had already suffered much—the big Bible, in fact.

"You'd better go and feed," the Terrier flung at him, without interrupting his survey of the barren sea. "I'm fastin'."

Any lingering doubt in Mr. Harkles's mind as to what was in store for him was resolved at sight of the big Bible. He knew his fate, and, to his credit be it said, he resigned himself on the instant, and resigned himself cheerfully. It was a case of sick man who must either die or get better, therefore a hopeful case. Following on the winter of his discontent must come the summer season of recovery—and making amends.

"There's no hurry," said hungry Harkles, as if he meant it.

The Terrier lowered his binoculars, turned, looked at the big Bible, looked at Mr. Harkles. "You want your lunch, don't you?" he grumped.

"I'll read to you first with pleasure, if you like, sir," said smiling Harkles.

"No," his host decided. "You'd better feed first. I'm fastin'." He hesitated, looking at Mr. Harkles as if he were making up his mind with an effort. "I'll see you feed, if you like," he got out at last.

The effort dumbfounded Mr. Harkles, for it was obviously an effort to be polite, a thing unprecedented in their intercourse. But he suspected a trap in the reluctant attempt, and guardedly declined the proffered attention. Besides, there would be no satisfying a healthy appetite for good things with that jaundiced eye upon him, and that bitter tongue pretending to restrain him for his own good. But consideration was the diplomatic pose, so he assumed it. "I'd rather not take you

below," he said. "It's a sin to lose five minutes of this glorious sunshine, this splendid air! I'll be back directly."

His exit, bravely made, was to all appearance as buoyant as his entry; but it was another man, an angry, depressed, disappointed man, who left the deck.

There was no preparation for luncheon in the saloon, no table laid, and not a flower about, another sign of the times. Chairs and sofas, too, were bereft of their downy silken cushions, and, so far as was possible, austerity had been signalled as the order of the day.

Mr. Harkles rang sharply and commanded lunch. The taciturn steward brought him a tray on which were bread, butter, biscuits, cheese, and a siphon of soda-water. The cheese was homely cheddar. Had it been something exclusive in the way of cheese the offence would not have been so great; but common cheddar, eaten every day by common people——! Mr. Harkles showed his feelings. The taciturn steward, in view of the gentleman's discomposure, sought to conceal his by putting his hand to his mouth, but he spoke respectfully: "If you'd like anything hot, sir," he said—and Mr. Harkles enjoyed a moment of delusive hope—"there's tea, coffee, and cocoa can be made in a minute."

Mr. Harkles despised menials. "You've got to let 'em know you're a gentleman," he used to say. "The flunkey breed has no discernment. They'd never find it out for themselves." It was for the purpose of letting 'em know that he was habitually more ducal in his attitude towards them than any duke; and because he was more ducal in his attitude towards him than any duke, the "flunkey breed" despised Mr. Harkles, and used him despitefully when they safely could. Mr. Harkles's subconscious self was aware of this. He was on the defensive, instinctively, and never gave himself away if he could help it. He knew now from the man's manner that there would be nothing forthcoming that he had not mentioned; knew also that the man was glad, and that it would gratify him to be able to refuse Mr. Harkles anything that he asked for. Mr. Harkles determined not to gratify him.

"Oh, anything," he said off-hand. "I should like something hot. *Café-au-lait* is best, perhaps, at this time of day."

"Beg pardon, sir, there's only condensed milk, sir," Taciturn Steward had him, as who should say, "How's that for you, my fine feeder!"

But Mr. Harkles scored. "I like condensed milk best," he blandly affirmed.

Then he felt better, as a man who has learnt the worst may feel better because there is nothing worse to learn. For he knew now what was in store for him. The Terrier was for fasting to mortify the flesh, and he, Harkles Superbus, was doomed to fast too.

The unregenerate at the Land and Leisure Club held that Lord Terry de Beach's "religious antics" were performed solely for the pleasure of tormenting Mr. Harkles; if so, the present experiment was well conceived by the humoresque old man. And it was true in part. At the same time there was no pretence about his periodical fears of the wrath to come. Mr. Harkles was right in his contention that Lord Terry de Beach was a sick man at these times. He was sick in every sense of the word—soul sick, heart sick, and bodily sick; and this last, the bodily sickness, was the factor which determined the other two disorders. But it was as whipping boy rather than as patient nurse that he regarded Mr. Harkles. When in this state, tormenting his Julius was the one thing that afforded him any real relaxation. It was hereditarily inherent in him to require others to suffer for his good. All over the world were human beings sweating blood that he might live in luxury, and if he had ever gone into the question of compensation for suffering, he would have obstinately maintained that their earnings in copper cash (thirty to a penny) in sens, cents, annas, kopecks, and pence, were ample. "They haven't our feelin's, the brutes!" he would argue, damning and blustering. "A livin' wage is enough for 'em, and that they get if they spent it properly. D'ye want me to pay for their bloated improvidence? Miners drinkin' champagne, faugh!"—his belief in this legend was unshakable.—"Is that your blasted sense of justice? This everlastin' cant about a livin' wage makes me sick."

If he had had to make the pence for himself in his youth and live on them, he would have been saved from that sort of sickness, but at his age there was no hope for him. His own inverted sense of justice could never now expand in the right direction. The world as he saw it was an ill-ordered world in every respect in which it was not ordered for his special benefit. All the good things of life were to be heaped up for his use. Those who laboured to collect the good things and roll them his way should consider it a privilege to have the job. They

must be kept alive, of course, they must eat, drink, and sleep for his benefit, but the bare necessaries were all that they merited or required in their station of life. He defeated his own end there, for his conception of what should suffice for those who provided him with luxuries and upheld him in his state, so often fell short of what was necessary, that they were in worse case than his horses, for whose comfort and requirements he made the most liberal allowance. He knew that good, willing work is only to be got out of a horse by care and kindness, plentiful good food and comfortable housing; but he could not be persuaded that the same methods answer best with human tools. He understood horses better than he understood men, because he had a genuine affection for them—based, of course, on the amount they could do for him—therefore he considered and cherished them; for mankind, individuals excepted, he had no love, so he missed the profit he aimed at, for love is the great Enlightener, as well as the only investment that never fails to pay its cent per cent. Even for the remission of his sins he felt it just that there should be a vicarious sufferer. From the Lord's death upon the Cross to the petty torments he heaped upon Mr. Harkles, he was content with the arrangement. He was by way of using Mr. Harkles just now to serve two purposes at once. It relieved his crying sense of the need of punishment here below to use him as whipping boy, and also he sincerely believed that by saving Mr. Harkles's soul he would cleanse his own and make it acceptable. Accordingly, Mr. Harkles found himself a living sacrifice, offered up daily, to propitiate the curious deity whom Lord Terry feared. He was dragged out of his comfortable berth at sunrise and put to religious exercises fasting; he who was dependent as any lady on his chocolate to help him up. Lord Terry was great on mortifying the flesh in this way just then. Instinctively, as a sick dog physics itself, he adopted the means of redemption which his body sorely needed. He regulated his diet by the lives of the saints. Had he regulated it by his doctor's advice, the process would have been slower; for his doctor would have compromised in the case of Lord Terry de Beach; would have sought to gratify his appetite while curbing it, which in effect would have been about on a par with the compassionate lady's order to have the puppy dog's tail cut off bit by bit, so as not to hurt him too much at a time. To mortify the flesh Lord Terry practised strict abstinence in the orthodox way both in food and

drink, taking only enough of anything to support life; and, since a stinted quantity of the plainest diet was all that was provided, Mr. Harkles had perforce to do the same. The Terrier revived at the sight of Harkles Superbus trying to breakfast on porridge and condensed milk under the eye of the taciturn steward, whose pleasure in the feat Mr. Harkles sensitively suspected. When he ate little, Lord Terry congratulated him. "An empty stomach He will in no wise cast out," he assured him. "Besides, there is poetry in an empty stomach; it may be filled with inspiration."

He knit his shaggy brows and glared at Mr. Harkles, but his lips were quivering under his moustache, and his Julius knew that he was enjoying the momentary relief of a laugh at his expense.

Keeping his victim out at sea, strenuously engaged in making his soul, afforded Lord Terry, for a time, the kind of consolation that did him most good. What Mr. Harkles suffered, the knees of his trousers revealed. His supply, which was not inexhaustible, had to be economised in view of probable contingencies when the reaction set in and making amends was the order of the day; and he, who was made miserable by the suspicion of a flaw in his dress, had to appear before the whole ship's company disfigured by the bulging consequences of the knee-drill imposed upon him by the relentless Terrier, who during the reading of the interminable prayers, kept one eye on his book and the other on Mr. Harkles, to see that he did not shirk the discipline. He had caught him at it once, slipping his cap under his aching knees, and had read the prayers twice over, a drastic punishment which effectually cured Mr. Harkles of shirking, if only the Terrier could have been made to believe it, but he remained suspicious.

The big Bible to which so many associations were attached, was constantly to the fore. But each day was different—that was one of Mr. Harkles's trials; he never knew what was expected of him, and was constantly subjected to profane objurgations and invidious criticisms of his appearance and character, because he did not know. There were times when the Terrier would not speak to him; times when he probed Mr. Harkles's spiritual state to the bone, as it were, for signs of growth, a painful operation; times when he was for confessing his own sins with contrition, for the good of his soul, but became di-

verted by the subject and enjoyed himself sinfully all over again in the recital. These were the only relaxations that Mr. Harkles had, and he was made to pay for them with the Bible and bad language, stricter diet to mortify the flesh, more strenuous religious exercises. The tyrannical old man was bent on wringing from his Julius a confession of faith, on bringing him to confess himself a sinner, and on forcing from him the culminating assertion that he had found forgiveness and was saved! Saved! And Mr. Harkles knew that these concessions were all that was wanted to stop the fantastic cruise and carry them straight into port in search of the means of making amends. Yet he could not do it. He had as a rule no repugnance to lying when it suited himself, but on this subject for some inexplicable reason he could not lie. Even to escape from the prolonged nightmare of his life on the yacht he could not do it,—a limitation which was all the more curious because he had nothing to lose and much to gain by professing himself a convert. If he could have humoured the Terrier by proclaiming himself saved, he might have reckoned on promotion. From the invidious office of whipping boy he would have been elevated to the post of beloved disciple, a post of power and rich emolument. And if he could he would have done it. He considered the possibility, persuaded himself that it would be an excusable bit of acting, a part played for a sick man's benefit, an easy part to play—at least so it seemed when he rehearsed it to himself. But, always, when it came to the point, he baulked involuntarily.

There was nothing for it then but patience. He understood his patron. His fear of the wrath to come would wear itself out in time, and there would be high jinks to celebrate the reaction. If only his Julius endured until the end, he was sure of a share in the high jinks, a reward worth winning.

When Lord Terry tired of the open sea, he ordered the yacht to cruise up and down the Riviera. Lying in full view of the places in which Mr. Harkles most yearned to be, was one of his favourite devices for trying his victim's constancy. Had Mr. Harkles expressed a wish to land, he would have been promptly marooned, as he well knew. This was a danger to be avoided at no matter what sacrifice to the knees of his trousers. For between being on the Riviera as the guest of Lord Terry de Beach and being there on his own means and position, there was all the difference between being a person of consequence or

a poor devil glad of the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table.

But it was hard to "rock little boat beneath the quiet sky" off Monte Carlo, where every prospect pleases and only man is vile. Mr. Harkles did not express it to himself in this strain. He thought of it as a jolly little place, with lots going on. The tables were not the attraction. Long ago he had made his name there by winning four times running on zero with five francs left to accumulate; a signal distinction on which, wise in his folly, he had travelled ever since. It was the rich possibilities Society at Monte Carlo afforded of thrilling twos-and-twos to be put together for which he lusted. There was Nice, too, flat to the eye, but oh! so full of the kind of adventure he hankered to observe. For long sunny hours they lay off in the blue bay, in full view of carriages rolling to and fro on the Promenade des Anglais, of sumptuous hotels, and marble villas with close-drawn sun-blinds and secret *jalousies* suggestive of intrigue. And above yonder was Cimiez and Royalty, to which Mr. Harkles naturally felt himself akin, since his conception of Royalty was all compact of occasions rich in the right clothes, worn as a duty. Lord Terry tantalised him by going on shore himself at Nice to stretch his legs, he said, but he would not ask Mr. Harkles to accompany him, because he knew that his Julius hated exercise. He returned with letters, an armful of newspapers, and a boat-load of fruit and flowers. The sight of the flowers did Mr. Harkles good, as vanities symptomatic of the overdue but inevitable reaction. He fell upon the Society papers, a barmecidal feast, though with compensation in the distraction.

They next steamed west, full speed, as if with a purpose, but Mr. Harkles knew better than to ask questions. Fleecy mist lay white in the brown hollows of the Estérel as they passed towards evening. Mr. Harkles, for something to say, remarked upon this as a beauty.

"It looks like cottonwool in a rotten tooth," Lord Terry snapped.

He spoke no more until after dinner. It was raining that night, so they sat on at table in the saloon. Their frugal repast had consisted of poached eggs—two, if you liked—and banana fritters; their beverage water. Mr. Harkles was thirsty. He had to drink it, but he left it to the last.

Then the Terrier broke silence. "Fresh water," he said. "Enjoy it while you can get it, you miserable sinner. It'll not

be provided in the place you're bound for—not a drop to moisten your lips."

"You shall have some, I promise you, sir, wherever we are," Mr. Harkles promptly replied. "I'll get it for you somehow."

"Will ye!' said Lord Terry, eyeing him sardonically. "So I'm to accompany you?"

"Is that fair, sir?" Mr. Harkles asked, in an injured tone.

There was a pause; then the Terrier said with a groan: "It's no subject for jestin'. Don't flatter yourself that you'll escape punishment because you don't believe. The unrepentant sinner is doomed to suffer here and hereafter. There's straits for the wicked man, I've seen it myself. He suffers in himself, or he suffers the loss of his dearest, which is a form of sufferin' that you'll escape, because you are your own dearest, and you can't be made to lose yourself while your heart is hard; for if you lost yourself you'd find yourself and be saved. But you'll lose your dearest possession——"

"I shall lose you, then," Mr. Harkles got in, concealing a threat of death in a compliment.

"Ain't you got sins enough to answer for without lyin' when you needn't?" Lord Terry asked him. "I'm not dear to you, except in so far as I'm useful to give you a leg up when there's a good thing of this world goin' that you're not big enough to reach without my help. You'd do well to take the leg up in another sense that I'm doing my damnedest best to give you now. . . . What was I talking about? Oh, punishment. I tell you, you're bound to lose the thing you set most store on. There's your good looks"—Mr. Harkles glanced at himself complacently in a mirror opposite,—"for y'are a good-looking chap in the tailor-made-barber's-block style. Y'think y'look like breedin' brought up on ortolans, don't ye? Well, y'don't. The Almighty didn't sculpture you by hand. You're nothin' but a cast, a palpable imitation run in a mould. It's no use bein' ducal, y'don't take anybody in. Cheeseman there"—the taciturn steward—"would respect you more if you were genuine of your kind. If you showed your trade-mark he'd see nothin' amiss in it. . . . But what was I talkin' about? Oh, punishment and loss! That's what you'll lose. You'll lose your looks, your stock-in-trade with the women, then where'll you be? An outcast! A blasted outcast, the door slammed in your face, the cold shoulder turned to you."

Mr. Harkles changed countenance. Ostracism was the one

thing he dreaded. Was he being threatened? Lord Terry de Beach undoubtedly could find the means to bring it about if he determined upon such action as salutary. Lord Terry saw that he had made an impression and was animated to fresh efforts in the same vein.

"Your beautiful hair will fall off," he said, patting his own bald pate. "You'll develop a paunch," he embraced his own. "Your arms and legs will shrivel, and your lovely skin'll get speckled like a toad's. You'll lose your tact, your eye for colour and your taste in dress; then where'll you be with the women?"

The Terrier pretty well exemplified in his own person the defects he had enumerated. Mr. Harkles ran his eye over him expressively. "Yet you've not lost in the estimation of the women," he ventured to retaliate.

"No! Nor shall I. There's a difference, Mr. Harkles," the Terrier answered drily. "If I was putrid the blasted hussies would court me. It's not my beauty they love, it's Lord Terry de Beach. They're like you—mercenary. But it comes to the same thing," he added reminiscently.

Mr. Harkles extracted a ribald *double entente* from "the same thing," and laughed. Lord Terry, disconcerted, thought it over, saw it, and was also moved to mirth. Laughter is a cloud dispeller, but a man in his state hugs his affliction, and he was for holding on to his gloom.

"The hussies!" he ejaculated. "They'll catch it for their sins. Here and hereafter they'll catch it. We're all in the same boat, Harkles. We'll all be damned. When I look back——"

But the mood was not to be recaptured. The cloud had received a hoist, and another touch or two from the same source sufficed to roll it away. Looking back, he raked up details enough to produce the inevitable result. The sense of sin left him to the reminiscent enjoyment of past sinfulness, and his Julius was one with him again; a congenial crony, drawing him out, keeping him to the point, and working him up to the pitch at which excitement calls for more excitement.

"Wine, woman, and song,
The three things that send a man wrong,"

Mr. Harkles carolled, at the same time shaking his head to indicate that he regretted that it should be so, in case safety lay in that direction; for there was no knowing at what point

the cloud might gather again, and Lord Terry be down on him, whip in hand.

But the merry catch tickled Lord Terry. "What's that?" he asked sharply.

"Wine, woman, and song,
The three things that send a man wrong,"

Mr. Harkles repeated, this time without affecting to think it a pity. Involuntarily Lord Terry tapped his foot to the tune; meditatively he hummed it.

"After all, the world's as it is," Mr. Harkles mused.

"O cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right,"

Lord Terry grumbled.

"Life let us cherish!" Mr. Harkles cheered up, gauging the moment propitious. "There's nothing like life when you know how to live."

"'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,
Oh life, not death, for which we pant;
More life, and fuller, that I want,"

Lord Terry gave forth sonorously, playing up to the theme without reflection.

The intensive tone burrows deepest into the feelings; Mr. Harkles adopted it. "Begone, dull care!" he uttered prayerfully. "Life is the supreme gift of the Giver! I could drink to life!"

Dull care fell from Lord Terry. "You shall!" he exclaimed. "We'll both drink! We'll drink till we see two of each other, two jolly good fellows damning damnation! . . . Cheeseman, champagne! And look sharp, you blithering tortoise."

But the wine had an unexpected effect on the Terrier. The more he drank, the more normal he became, the more Lord Terry de Beach on official occasions, ceremonious, not to be trifled with. And he stopped short at that, abruptly wished his guest a polite good-night, and retired—leaving Mr. Harkles to the solitary enjoyment of a fresh bottle.

Mr. Harkles was not reassured by this phenomenal courtesy. He was afraid it portended unpleasant developments. If Lord Terry had discharged a volley of oaths at him, or, better still, called him "Old Clothes-horse" or "Jolly old Rag Doll," his favourite terms of endearment when Mr. Harkles was in favour, it would have been more natural, and certainly more encouraging. Filled with champagne and foreboding, Mr. Harkles turned in, and was humiliated during the night by his stomach, which rejected the mixture.

2

Lord Terry had curbed his vicious appetites to mortify his flesh for the good of his soul, but the flesh itself, suffering from over-indulgence, was glad of the discipline. Abstinence, rest, seclusion, and sea air, tried as a punishment, had the opposite effect. And it may be that it was at the good ordering of the flesh, when it required a stimulant as medicine, that he called for champagne. At all events, the wine acted rather as a restorative than as a lapse into sin with direful consequences. When he turned in that night the barometer of his mind was still low, but he slept well, and when he opened his eyes the scales had fallen from them; he saw beauty, he felt glad, life was worth living, and death a possibility too far off to bother him. His body had reacted to the cure, and the barometer had risen all at once, though not to set fair. He was not quite his unregenerate self, satisfied to sin; the storm still muttered in the distance, the clouds were still about, though broken, and an occasional flash and clap might be expected. But for a little his spirit basked in sunshine, he commented to himself on things about him as looking "jolly nice," and he took it that a voracious appetite was a sign from heaven to eat his fill. He tumbled out of his berth, ordered every good thing the vessel could provide for breakfast, and called up Mr. Harkles. But Mr. Harkles refused to get up. He said he was out of sorts. Lord Terry smiled to himself, understanding of the excuse, and amused himself by sending to his Julius in his cabin some of every dish on the table that a man in his case was bound to abhor.

The mind does not willingly recall past pains any more than the body; in the one case as in the other hurts forgotten hurt no more. The healthy mind occupies itself. Lord Terry's

provided him with pleasant distraction; he did not try to think. When he went on deck the morning was still grey; light airs tripped across the water, rippling it, like smiles heralding a laugh. Sea-birds with white breasts and grey wings dotted with black—beautiful, healthy, happy birds—hovered round the yacht, their bright eyes intent upon him. He did not bless them unawares. More practical than The Ancient Mariner, he called for bread and bombarded them with bits, which pleased them better than a barren blessing, probably. It amused him to see them swoop at the bits of bread. When they missed one in the air he called them "Idiots!" When they caught one he said "Good shot!" Theirs the blame and his the credit. Finally, tiring of this game, he flung the remains of the loaf into the sea, and left the birds behind in a bunch, squabbling over it.

The yacht was bound east now, hugging the shore. In fairy bays and inlets, miniature paradises to bathe from, tiny waves broke on soft sands invitingly, and lapped up the ribs of rugged red rocks, festooned with flowering geranium and crowned with olive and palm. Here a villa aired itself on the outermost edge of a rocky peninsular, enjoying the view; and there another, vainly seeking seclusion, was betrayed by its own walls gleaming white through dense green foliage. And behind all, sheltering the fertile foreground, the russet hills growing ever more arid the higher they rose, like a self-centred saint who starves his heart to perfect his soul, cut the sky with jagged peaks. The landscape being reversed, nothing reminded Lord Terry of yesterday until they came abreast of the brown Estérel. There again the mist lay thick and white in the hollows, and he recollected that, to snub his Julius, he had likened it to cotton-wool in a rotten tooth. The jibe was a vent for his ill-humour at the moment; now it offended his taste, and his mind adventured in search of a finer phrase. "Pearly mist," he rejected as banal; "Down dropping mists of thinnest lawn" because it was a quotation, and credit depended on his being poetical off his own bat. "White mist" was exact but bald, and "Translucent," an admirable word, did not fit it. The mental adventure was ending in irritation because it was unsuccessful when they rounded up off Cannes, in the teeth of a heavenly breeze perfumed with flowers, and things present to be observed diverted his thoughts. The sun shone, and the *Daydawn* rocked in a turquoise sea reflected from a turquoise sky. Astern lay the Lerins, and Isle Marguerite, charged with the sufferings of the

Man in the Iron Mask, to the delectation of tourists. The curved arm of the land enfolded the blue bay. Mountains encompassed the town-clad hills, rising range beyond range to the sky, where it stooped to kiss their ultimate crests of snow. Villas gleamed white in the sunshine, set in green gardens where palm and palmetto encircled islands of yellow mimosa, and grey-green olives unvauntingly held their own. Dazzling white fringes of foam edged the water that rose and lapped lingeringly on rock and sandy beach. There were no waves to break, but even the tideless sea is never wholly at rest, and its song is incessant. A mingled murmur of wind and water and music accompanied the stately progress of the yacht as she slowly drew in shore and lay-to opposite the Cercle Nautique. And it was just at that moment that Mr. Harkles appeared on deck, big Bible in hand according to standing orders. Sitting upright on a hard bench nursing the Bible, evidently not at all well, with dejection exuding from every pore, he was a pitiable object; wilted, like a sun-smitten shrub thirsting in a drought. There he was, a Peri at the gate of his paradise, excluded, disconsolate. On the veranda of the Cercle Nautique, under the awning, men were lounging,—among them, it might be, Royalty itself. Carriages dashed about, promenaders moved to and fro, and the Croisette bloomed with bright-coloured parasols like a border gay with anemones. Mr. Harkles, his longing eyes on the throng, sighed dolorously at intervals. The Man in the Iron Mask gazing through the barred window of his prison where it frowns, a mass of time-stained masonry rising from the water's edge on Isle Marguerite, was never more heart-sick for liberty than Mr. Harkles, voluntarily enduring captivity on Lord Terry de Beach's sumptuous yacht for mere purposes of his own. Bending over the big Bible at intervals, he made a vain attempt to smooth out the unsymmetrical bulges from the knees of his white duck trousers. It struck Lord Terry as pathetic that his Julius should be so concerned about his trousers. He had until now forgotten his religious exercises, but the big Bible reminded him, and he eyed it askance. And, alas, the breeze, which affected to be fresh, was a poisonous deceiver, for it was the kill-joy Mistral itself, and Lord Terry, who was keenly susceptible to its baneful effect and had besides breakfasted too generously for a convalescent, though he made a fight for it, suddenly succumbed and relapsed into gloom. His chronic mental malady seized upon him. He thought of the

wrath to come, and suffered qualms of fear on his own account, and qualms of irritation because all his efforts to save his Julius with the help of the Bible and bad language had hitherto been abortive, in consequence of the dolt's asinine obstinacy. In a moment the prospect both within and without had lost its loveliness. He turned from the gay town as from a vision of sin. The grace of the little white sailing yachts streaming forth from the harbour, like birds upheld by broad white wings the while they dipped their breasts in the sea, made no appeal to him. The many-tinted Estérel, upsoaring from the waves, a tumbled mountain mystery of beauty shrouded in mist, suggested an inferno full of smoke, to his disordered fancy.

"It's a solemn thought, my Julius," he broke out at last, "that when you and I are dust those infernal mountains and even that rotten town will still be there, lookin' just the same on a day like this. Given your full term of life, it'll be but a moment from now till you're in your grave, in a beastly, disgustin' state. The worms'll be riddlin' you. Their horrid heads'll be lookin' out through holes in your skin."

"I shall not be there," Mr. Harkles interposed, rather hastily.

"No, you'll not be there," Lord Terry answered with solemn emphasis. "But the question is, where'll you be?"

Mr. Harkles found himself unprepared with any decided reply. Ordinarily he was content to think of himself as going out at a puff like the flame of a candle; but in face of those everlasting hills, in face of those trumpery houses which were to continue though he was no more; in face of all "questionings of sense and outward things," and above all with the feeling in himself that he, the conscious man, was more important than any, even the most stupendous, inanimate object, he shrank from proclaiming himself nothing but flesh, doomed to corruption. It was as if by formulating the supposition he would be sentencing his sentient self to be food for the worms.

"I am agnostic," he finally temporised. "I don't know. . . . I wish I did," he added sincerely.

"Agnostic!" Lord Terry exclaimed with supreme contempt. "You're Mr. Facin'-bothways, sittin' on the fence."

But Mr. Harkles was not attending. His eye was on a large white yacht riding at anchor alone in the middle of the harbour, as if holding herself proudly aloof from the dozen or so of other yachts which lay close together, side by side, stern on to the quay. A yacht of that size meant money; it might also

mean high social position. Whose could it be? If only it belonged to somebody he knew, and he could get on board, he might be rescued without loss of any of the advantages he would be enjoying with Lord Terry in a normal mood. But, alas! there was no time to escape. Heavy volumes of black smoke were ascending from the funnels of the yacht; she was evidently getting up steam. And presently she backed from her berth, with grace and dignity, glided from the harbour, and made towards the *Daydawn*, putting on speed as she approached.

Mr. Harkles cast aside the Bible, adjusted his binoculars, and sprang to his feet. "What a superb boat!" he exclaimed. "Whose can it be? The finest I've ever seen!"

"Then you've never seen the *Daydawn*," Lord Terry snarled jealously, raising his glasses. "There's not another——"

He stopped short. The strange boat was passing them close. On deck, standing well forward, shading her eyes from the glare with one hand, was a woman in white. With her other hand she was holding a broad white scarf up to her throat. The scarf, passed across her chest and under her arms, streamed out behind and spread, fluttering, like a pair of wings.

"Jove!" Lord Terry ejaculated. "Might be the Winged Victory herself—restored."

"The Winged Victory!" Mr. Harkles all but shouted. "It is! By Jingo, *it is!*"

"It is what, you bawlin' idiot?"

"It is the Winged Victory, otherwise Miss Ella Banks, the Lace Girl, and the yacht is,—yes—the yacht—is—the *Iphigenia!*"

Mr. Harkles dropped his voice as he made these statements, sobered by the tremendous importance of the discovery.

Lord Terry, sobered too, glanced at the inscription on the prow, though he had no need to, then fixed his glasses on the white winged figure standing well forward, poised as if about to fly; an animated figure, eagerly on the lookout. But he said never a word.

The *Iphigenia* passed at full speed, the parted waves foaming from her bows, a-scallop along her sides, a turmoil of liquid turquoise mixed with streaks of sparkling snow in her wake. She came and was gone, circling the Lerins, leaving a trail of heavy black smoke behind, in proof of her passage.

"Now!" Mr. Harkles cried triumphantly.

That glimpse of Ella Banks on the Duke's yacht was a shock

and a tonic to Lord Terry de Beach; it brought him back to his normal self with all his worldly wits about him. Here was a pretty how-d'ye-do! This fellow Harkles must be gagged.

Lord Terry took out his pocket-handkerchief and polished the glasses of his binoculars. "Now what?" he asked abstractedly. "Oh, you were sayin' that yacht was the finest afloat. I'd forgotten her. But, of course, I don't pretend to compete with the Duke of Castlefield Saye."

"Which is a pity," Mr. Harkles complimented him; "for it is something to have carried off the loveliest woman of the day, and, if you had competed, what chance would there have been for the Duke?"

Lord Terry affected indifference, but, brought back to his normal outlook on life, he was not insensible to the compliment. His mind was good ground for seed so flattering to his vanity, and it produced a crop of agreeable sensations. But there was Ninny to be considered, Ninny, the blitherin' idiot! What in the name of the devil in hell could the infernal blockhead be thinkin' of? He must have gone stark, stock, starin' mad about that girl. For it wasn't like him—no, it wasn't the way Ninny did things at all. Lord Terry was puzzled. But also he was loyal to his own, and here was this Harkles-outsider to be shut-up, and Harkles was saying: "I don't understand the Duke."

"No, you wouldn't, Mr. Harkles," Lord Terry hit at him drily, as "not one of us." "He's not crude, you see"—his Julius felt himself accused of crudity—"Ninny looks like a stinkin' shop-walker, feels like King Arthur, and acts—acts like a man——"

"Which allows him considerable latitude," Mr. Harkles got in.

"The latitude depends, Mr. Harkles," said Lord Terry de Beach. "There are such things as principles, you may have heard. When I say he acts like a man, I am referrin' to a man of his position and responsibilities, holdin' as he does to the precept, *noblesse oblige*. D'ye mean to tell me he'd be puttin' into Cannes in broad daylight if there was anythin' to conceal? How'd that be for crude?" The question accented the enormity of what he suspected to be the Duke's indiscretion, and he paused to curse him silently for a fool. "Crudity!" he ejaculated, resuming the defensive. "There's no crudity in the Brabant blood. Bred out of 'em, sir, by involuntary adaptation to their surroundin's. Subtlety, that's what you get as

you go up higher; comin' down, you arrive at the money-made man who blazons his vices, such is his love of display."

"Well, anyway, that was Ella Banks on the Duke's yacht," Mr. Harkles stuck to it.

"There's no denyin' it," Lord Terry acknowledged; "and the nasty-minded'll have their explanation. But it doesn't mean what *you* suppose, Mr. Harkles, I'll swear. Ninny's too damned chivalrous. He mayn't bother much about the Duchess, but he considers his wife's feelin's—considers the woman. Advertisin's foreign to his habits. He couldn't hurt a woman, not when he's face to face with her; and that kind of thing, blazoned, would break his wife's heart. I know Good Gracious, most partic'lar woman, and I know Ninny, and feelin's react. Hurtin' her would be hurtin' himself—which," Lord Terry reflected, "shows consideration to be egotism in fancy-dress."

"Of course, you know him best," Mr. Harkles replied, feigning to give in. "I don't presume to pit my knowledge of the Duke against yours, sir. The explanation is probably both simple and satisfactory." He paused, then added, as if passing to an indifferent topic: "He didn't show much consideration for your feelings when he cut his name on that Louis Quatorze table you value."

"No, the brute! His whole blasted name, too—Castlefield Saye, in capital letters," Lord Terry burst out, with a string of objurgations. Mr. Harkles allowed these to rumble away, then offered an anodyne.

"Well, at any rate," he said, "a name so distinguished carved on the table by the bearer, must add to its value."

"Value be damned!" said Lord Terry. "It's the beauty *I* think of. He's ruined it, devil rot him—God forgive me!"

He relapsed into gloom. A fugitive sense of sin had attacked him, and the wrath to come rose to the surface again, as of immediate importance.

But Mr. Harkles's spirits had risen. It was evident that the good things of this life were renewing their appeal to Lord Terry. The reaction had certainly set in, and a word might precipitate it. Mr. Harkles lighted on the word. "Cannes's pretty full," he said, "according to the *Eavesdropper* you brought on board at Nice. Lady Cruxhaven was one of the new arrivals."

The name jerked Lord Terry up out of his gloom like a jack-in-the-box at a touch on the spring.

"Eh? What? Lady Cruxhaven!" He surveyed the town with interest. "Deuced fine woman," he said reflectively. "Innocent eyes, milk-white skin, and that hair, my Julius! She could draw a man from heaven with that hair alone." He cocked his cap rakishly. "I say," he suggested, "it would be only 'polite to leave a card on her, eh?"

"'Walk not in sinner's way,'" wily Harkles reminded him demurely. Opposition was the right thing now, to make him obstinate.

"I'm not for walkin'," he snapped. "A shake of the hand and how d'ye do isn't walkin'. It's nothin' but common politeness—considerin'."

"You can't touch pitch without being defiled," said pious Harkles.

"Do I understand you to be applyin' that opprobrious epithet to the lady in question, Mr. Harkles?" Lord Terry de Beach asked haughtily.

His Julius shrugged his shoulders.

The Terrier, nonplussed, cast a furtive glance at the town. "I'm not for touchin' or tastin' or anythin' but how-d'ye-doin'," he said. "Besides"—he shifted his ground—"how are you to save sinners if you pass 'em by on the other side? Put on the whole armour of righteousness, *I* say, and you're safe to go for 'em bald-headed."

At this last figure of speech, so apt in his own case, the Terrier laughed loudly. Mr. Harkles remained grave. "I wonder if she has a soul to be saved," he meditated audibly.

Lord Terry was down on him with: "Confound your impudence! 'She' is the cat."

"They say so, yes," Mr. Harkles hit back, blandly perverse; "but I do not myself believe that a woman with such a voice can be altogether a cat."

Lord Terry perceived that to gain his end he must make for it straight. "Think of that voice!" he sighed sentimentally. "Soulful? Why, man, it's soul itself!"

"A soul to be saved, perhaps, out here on the ocean, with only a plank between her and eternity." He gazed at the bulwark, as though testing its strength.

"Gad! That's an awful thought!" Lord Terry exclaimed, shuddering.

"There are tiles on shore, too," said Mr. Harkles. "One on your head, and you may be done for any day."

"When you think of it," Lord Terry pursued, "what do you feel, my Julius, with only a plank between you and eternity?"

"I feel safe," said Mr. Harkles, blinking up at the brightness of the sky.

"Does that mean," said Lord Terry impressively, "that you are saved?"

"I have no fear," Mr. Harkles said truly, death appearing to him at the moment as a negligible possibility.

"You have no fear? Why, blast your soul, that's conversion!" Lord Terry roared. "Oh, my Julius, you've got it! You're a damned convert! No fear? That's the peace that passeth understandin'. I'll be jiggered if this isn't the finest moment of my life. Savin' souls! That's the ticket that wins a man through."

It was a desperate moment for Mr. Harkles. He was fairly trapped. But did the Terrier really believe in his conversion, and should he let the belief take root in his mind? In that case, the Terrier would probably use the event as an excuse for an outburst of jollity, and celebrate it in an original and agreeable manner. Present prospects of pleasure were good; blight them, and the Terrier might take him out to sea again, or jettison him onto a shore where no one of any great social consequence particularly wanted to entertain him. The old man was stamping about the deck rubbing his hands gleefully. Why not leave him under the beneficent delusion that he had saved a soul? Harkles Superior hastily decided that, for the present at any rate, that would be the kindest thing to do. Should the Terrier later on, in the exercise of his peculiar sense of humour, use the tacit concession as an excuse to inflict fresh torments upon him, his Julius flattered himself that he would find a way out, and once for all.

"If Lady Cruxhaven had had the privileges that I have had on this yacht," he said unctuously; "if she had come under your influence undiluted by the world, as it is here on these broad waters, with only a plank between her and eternity, she would be as I am now, without fear."

"D'ye think so?" Lord Terry asked sharply. "Red Ruin saved!" He seemed doubtful of the possibility.

"Why not?" said Mr. Harkles. "Think of——"

But he could not think of anyone who could be mentioned in comparison without implicitly aspersing Lady Cruxhaven's fair fame, and bringing the uncertain Terrier down upon him

again for his blasted impudence, so he refrained from particularising.

"Princess Taxidos is at Cannes, too," the Terrier remarked, proof that he had been dipping into the worldly *Eavesdropper* himself; "and Lady Ballard and Sarb. They're a nice lot, those women." With a shake of his head, he despaired of them.

"Agreeable women," said Mr. Harkles, affecting to mistake his meaning, "and susceptible, all three of them. There's no knowing what might happen under favourable circumstances."

He sat down as if he had done with the subject, took up the big Bible, and, opening it haphazard, his eye lighted on the words, which he read aloud slowly and sonorously: "*. . . and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;*

"*And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my spirit . . .*"

Lord Terry inclined his ear. "There's somethin' in that," he said.

"A pointing," Mr. Harkles suggested.

There came to Lord Terry at the moment a whiff of perfume, which conjured up a vision of orange-trees, a mass of glossy dark-green foliage dappled with milk-white blossom and golden fruit; of old stone walls, rugged and grey, garlanded with roses; of purple violets, fields of them, and glowing carnations, rank upon rank. He sniffed. There was a scent of flowers in the air; but there was something better in it, too. There was new life in it. He glanced up afar at one white peak, bright in the sunshine. "*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help,*" he muttered to himself.

Mr. Harkles also looked up, but he looked no higher than the burgee at the masthead. "The wind's changed!" he exclaimed. "We're rid of that cursed Mistral. We'll be feeling fit as fiddles again in no time. It's La Tramontane, fresh from the snows."

3

During luncheon the Terrier was thoughtful, but the capricious black cloud held off. In the first flow of the reaction his Julius was again a good old Clothes-horse, with much to recommend him. Red Ruin, too, with her splendid hair and lovely

voice. What a woman! Misguided, no doubt, but sociable as Mary Magdalen herself, and surely worthy to be saved! But he couldn't stand that Taxidos woman—

"She's saved her face in Society," said Mr. Harkles, for the defence.

"She's rich and amusin'," was Lord Terry's cynical retort. "She never amuses me, though. She's opinionated and tart."

"I rather like to hear a woman drop her opinions," said Mr. Harkles.

"I don't, when they're all acid-drops." the Terrier growled. "I suppose the three of 'em are together, thick as thieves, as usual. Maud Ballard and Sarb's all right, but I'd like to shunt that Taxidos animal."

"That's not to be done, I'm afraid, if you want Lady Cruxhaven," Mr. Harkles deprecated. "And, after all, no case is hopeless. There is a kind of goodness even in women, if men, admiring them, would only find it out," Mr. Harkles laid down in the full voice of authority, under the impression that he was quoting Shakespeare.

Lord Terry caught his intention, smiled, then relapsed into thought. "There may be, of course," he said at last; "there may be a 'soul of goodness' even in Princess Taxidos. We'll see, Harkles. We'll see if we can't 'observingly distil it out.'"

When the *Daydawn* was berthed in harbour alongside her sister craft, stern on to the quay, Tactful Harkles was peremptorily ordered off to bring the ladies on board, and he was in two minds how to execute the delicate mission. Should he beguile the ladies on board with a simple invitation, as he had been beguiled, or should he tell the tale of his own self-sacrifice, and implore their charitable co-operation in his efforts to nurse the sick man back to mental health? He rejected the first expedient because he knew they would foil it by insisting upon knowing who else was to be of the party before they committed themselves. There was nothing for it, then, but what he called candour. Therefore, finding the ladies together, he explained: "The only change for the mind-sick is an emotional change, and for that he must have the company of clever and beautiful women whom he likes and admires. He's up out of the dolorous ditch just now, but he'll be down in it again directly if he's shut up alone with me in the yacht. I've done my best for him, poor old man, but I'm only man. He's not equal to

a large party—at present—but if you ladies will take pity on him——?"

"We will," said Princess Taxidos. "We'll haul him up out of the dolorous ditch. At least, I'm game——"

So, it appeared, were the other two; they were game, that is to say, to snatch at the invitation, each for a private reason of her own. Lady Cruxhaven was "stoney," as she would have said, and she would be saving money on the yacht even if she were not making it, though of that she had hope, based on inductive reasoning. Princess Taxidos had overdone it in a search for thrills, and a period of seclusion was imperatively necessary to give Society's convenient memory time to forget her last enormity, so that she might find herself rehabilitated on her reappearance. And poor Maud Ballard and Sarb was throbbing to escape from a threatened return of her husband's love. He was just then being towed about by the ballet-dancer whose calves he considered too high, and his wife was in perpetual fear lest the tow-rope should break and let him loose to drift back to her, a disgusting habit he had. Always, just when she had secured another chance of happiness, there he was again, vowing her gipsy face was the only one he ever looked at. He made her hate her gipsy face, and she jumped on board, so to speak, to be safe out of his reach, for a while at least.

They left harbour to the spirited thrumming of guitars, and a chorus freshly sung in harmony extolling "A life on the ocean wave."

"Cheerin'," the Terrier called it enigmatically, and went below.

"Do you think we're on the right tack?" Red Ruin asked Mr. Harkles.

"There's no knowing," he said darkly; "but time will show. 'Music hath charms.'"

He indicated the guitars which Lady Ballard and Sarb and Red Ruin were nursing.

Princess Taxidos played the *cornet-à-pistons*.

The *cornet-à-pistons* for choice, but she was good on half-a-dozen other instruments. "I'm not to be beaten by anything," she was wont to boast, in as many languages as she played instruments.

"But your husband, dear," Red Ruin once gently offered her as an exception.

"Least of all by him," she said, and showed the arm which had routed Prince Taxidos.

Lord Terry may possibly have believed in his Julius' conversion, and have genuinely intended to celebrate the event in a becoming manner. He may even have intended to take the ladies in hand for the good of their souls had they given him an innings; but they were out to command both him and the yacht, and had turned both topsy-turvy in no time. In no time Red Ruin, purring in French, a language which lends itself to that form of expression, had roused the gambler's spirit in him. In the prospect of immediate profit and pleasure on earth (or sea), he let go his chance of an investment in heaven, and shook hands with the devil, with whom—except at odd intervals —he remained on good terms for the whole of that cruise. Human variability is enough to account for such a complete *volte-face,* if not to excuse it. But Lord Terry was too autocratic to concern himself about it at the time, for the purpose either of accounting or excusing. Of course, when it came to principles such as "supportin' your party," "Loyalty to the Queen—God bless her!" and "a gentleman stands by a woman when he gets her into trouble," he was to be relied upon. But "feelin's" are different. "Gettin' a woman into trouble" came into the category ruled by his "feelin's," and was therefore not against his principles. His dealings with heaven were also regulated by his varying "feelin's," apart from his principles. But he might have claimed that every expression of his "feelin's" was a religious observance, venerated in its time. When in gloom, he sought to propitiate the vengeful deity whose wrath he deprecated; when his spirits rose, he bowed to Venus and poured out libations to Bacchus as a matter of course. His "feelin's" exacted in turn their own acknowledgment in kind; he did not question them or think of them; he obeyed them. He was of ancient lineage, innate in him was a balance of feeling which inclined him equally to the opposite rites of different epochs; when circumstances affected the nice adjustment of the balance, whichever way it dipped, heredity determined the issue.

But it was only himself that he took for granted. In his outlook upon life he was shrewd enough, and not easily imposed upon. His philanderings with Red Ruin were guarded. Cruxhaven had given her her head, but he was a queer devil, you never knew what he would be at, and he had been "nosin' about after Janet Brastaby of late." Lord Terry suspected Red Ruin

of setting her cap at him to compromise him so that there could be nothing for it honourably but matrimony, should there be a divorce. He was therefore for "keepin' her off with a stick," but without depriving himself of the pleasure of her company. The stick was his manner. For lack of delicacy his compliments were often uncomplimentary. Rudeness disguised as humour by banter may be overlooked. He enjoyed being rude to her, and liked to provoke her, but he did not want to quarrel with her, therefore he addressed her habitually in a bantering tone. When she made him think she provoked him to sarcasm; and even when she pleased him best, he never for a moment lost his bad opinion of her. Involuntarily, his attitude was self-protective. He would pay, with a handsome *pour boire;* but there was no betraying him into the offer of half his kingdom.

As the Terrier's "feelin's" did not set that way, the question of religious observances was never raised. The determined Princess Taxidos seized the big Bible when she came on board and promptly concealed it; but its mysterious disappearance passed unremarked. Before they were well out to sea, she disappeared herself, and after a prolonged search was discovered curled up on a coal-bunker in the stoke-hole, and was with difficulty dislodged, she having (so Mr. Harkles always averred) become enamoured of the stoker on duty, a fine man, who, clad only in a pair of drawers, attracted her as a pleasing novelty in black and white effects, and by the distinction of his perfume.

The first evening on board the conspirators, like Br'er Fox, lay low, but the next they made hay of the conventions. On deck after dinner, assisted by Playful Harkles, the ladies forced Lord Terry de Beach into his *sang de bœuf* robe and turban, dubbed him Grand Turk, and enthroned him on a pile of cushions with Red Ruin seated at his feet, guitar in hand, as favourite odalisque. The Terrier played up. He called for a song, and Red Ruin sang "Come where my love lies dreaming" with the voice of an angel. He called for a dance, and Princess Taxidos blew a blast on the *cornet-à-pistons,* Mr. Harkles clashed the cymbals of his tambourine, and Lady Brandy and Soda fluttered up from below in a mist of black and red. With poinsettia in her black hair, and in short black skirts which emitted red flashes from below in the whirl of the dance, she favoured them with her famous *pas seul,* in the execution of which she was wont to affront Terpsichore with evolutions that were enough to hoist red signals of protest on the sallow face of a

well-seasoned almeh. Lord Terry, his "feelin's" pleasantly animated by the gay spectacle, clapped applause on Red Ruin's bare back, the which, shivering with repulsion at the touch of his hot, dry hand, she smilingly endured. And under the blinking stars the *Daydawn* was herself again.

4

But Red Ruin's purpose was being thwarted by numbers. The other ladies, vying with her incessantly to divert the Terrier, discounted her efforts. It was not a case of *embarras de choix*. The Terrier would never have thought of being happy with either were t'other dear charmer away; his large and generous temperament inclined him rather to embrace all three. The gaunt, determined, strident Princess Taxidos, whom nothing ever beat, managed somehow to conquer his objection to her. Daily intercourse had perhaps accustomed him to her harsh voice, and rendered him indifferent to the points in her appearance and character which had jarred on him in their casual *rencontres*. At any rate, he found her "entertainin'." She had an inexhaustible fund of good stories, and nobody could tell a story better, especially if it were horrible.

Lady Ballard and Sarb he understood, and to understand was to like and pity her. She was the victim of her circumstances, of her time and set. The desire of love and laughter had been implanted in her by Nature, and Nature insists inexorably on the satisfaction of her legitimate desires, but she is not inexorable in her demand for their legitimate satisfaction. If Maud Ballard and Sarb had had the love of a faithful husband and the laughter to be found in a wholesome, well-ordered life, she would have been happy enough. Indeed, that would have been the life of her choice. Defrauded of it and brought, defenceless, by her husband himself under the corruptest influences, her desire for love and laughter rendered her perversion inevitable. That she resented it, appeared in her hatred of her husband; she hated in him the vices he had taught her to tolerate in Society. But the greatest gift, the power to love purely, once bestowed, is never withdrawn. It may be ill-used, for it is a gift of gold, and gold is tarnishable; yet there it remains, gold still, answering always to the test. She could feel for the old man in his mental misery, and she had no ulterior design in

her efforts to divert him. The charming little mothering attentions with which she took him in hand, surprised and softened him. She won him to regard her with disinterested paternal affection, and was doing him good by calling this factor for regeneration out on active service. He found himself wishing her well, desiring to befriend her, ready to defend her even against herself. He was, in fact, unconsciously for saving her soul, not for his own benefit but for hers, an ennobling motive. Had she had him to herself, her disinterestedness and her womanly tenderness would have helped him as nothing else could. But there was Red Ruin, hard at work, subtly stultifying the more delicate influence. Her intent was coarsely seductive; the means she employed to further it was deceptively refined. On Sunday evening, sitting on deck in the dark, cuddled up close to the Terrier, when she sang hymns, her nightingale notes made him feel pious enough to want a religion; but the religion he leant to on these occasions was Mohammedan—Red Ruins in plenty sanctioned upon earth, and a plethora of Houris in heaven. He forgot the restriction upon alcohol.

With a touch of the sublime inconsistency peculiar to such women, an indication never wanting to potential Mary Magdalenes that the divine spark in them is not extinguished and may still be fanned to flame, Red Ruin had a feeling for the sanctity of the Sabbath. She liked to experience the thrill of a rarely-used set of emotions on Sunday, and would sing nothing but hymns. And she could sing hymns! She made the swarthy mariners, who crept aft like furtive shadows in the starlight when she sang, vow on their knees that "When the roll is called up yonder" they'd be there. Music buoys the spirit, though not always upward. The song such sirens sing is magically accommodated to the listeners' aspirations. To this one it is high heaven revealed, to that low revels, and yet another it fills with golden dreams of deeds heroical. So Red Ruin's singing could be meaty for carnal appetites, and at the same time strangely full of food for hungry souls. Listening, the taciturn steward was wafted in spirit to the little tabernacle poked away in a slum of London, where, at that hour, doubtless, his friends, George Bowden, the Hon. Col's man, and James Cutler, sometime in the service of the late Mr. Jaspar Brastaby, were testifying to the saving power of a living faith. He had no illusions about the singer, but he was grateful for the song, and

he prayed Heaven to afflict her that she might be saved by suffering. "If," he suggested to the Lord, "her hair fell off, her teeth rotted, and her milk-white skin turned sallow and blotched, she'd see things different"—which proved that he was subtly aware that her seeing was affected by the light in which she was seen. The reprobate old Terrier she held by both sides. She soothed away his horror of hell-fire, and at the same time made him free of fleshly satisfaction in an earthly paradise.

They had made a bee line for the Isles, but what Isles none of the ladies knew or cared. They only thought of their destination as the turning-point of the adventure, the end of these hours of monotonous boredom. What they looked forward to were the stoppages on the way back at ports where there were sure to be plenty of people. Red Ruin thought, too, of fine shops promising a chance to despoil the Terrier. "I'll show you one of the loveliest spots on earth," he had said, so they supposed that they were bound for some horrid place where there wasn't a soul about. "A fine place for a picnic," was the stereotyped testimonial they pinned on the very few glimpses of nature that pleased their fancy.

Coming up on deck for their cigarettes, coffee, and liqueurs, one warm evening after dinner, they found the yacht at anchor in a land-locked bay. A crescent moon, hung low in the clear dark of a sapphire sky, silvered the sea, and made mystery on shore with light and shade. But one glance at the picturesque promise of rugged cliffs and the jagged outlines of tree-clad hills was enough to make them shudder. Not a solitary light relieved the desolation with the hope of at least one house full of people. To seaward, however, was an item of interest, a large white vessel berthed not far from them and broadside on. Amidships was a circle of lamps, around which stood some half-dozen men. A confusion of sounds proclaimed them musicians tuning their instruments.

Lord Terry, extended in a long chair, sleepily content, took no interest in the strange vessel.

"It's a damned excursion steamer," he decided in disgust.

But another possibility had occurred to Mr. Harkles and put him on the alert.

A soft, long-drawn stream of music opened slowly, fanlike, on their ears. Lord Terry, contemplating the heavens, approved. "Perfect, perfect," he muttered several times. "All that was wanted."

The scene had its charm for him. He would fain have been left in peace to feel it.

"Oh, don't you want me?" Red Ruin asked reproachfully.

"You can sit beside me, if you like," he growled ungraciously. "only hold your"—"blasted" suppressed—"tongue."

"That's Strangworth's string band, or I'm a Dutchman," Mr. Harkles exclaimed.

"What d'ye say?" the Terrier asked in a wide-awake tone, at the same time getting on his feet.

"That's Strangworth's string band, I'll swear, on board the *Iphi*——"

But the Terrier silenced him in time with a shove that sent him staggering up against the taffrail.

The ladies were round him in a moment. What did he say? A yacht? Whose could it be? How can we find out? We're sure to know them! Or we can call or something. What fun!

But Mr. Harkles knew that the shove was an order to hold his tongue, or he'd catch it. "I'll fetch my binoculars," he said, and made his escape.

He knew better than to return. Besides, he wanted his binoculars himself to spy out all that could be seen on board the yacht from a porthole below, which was not much, but he had one moment of breathless excitement. There was a lady on deck, lying in a long chair. A man with his back to Mr. Harkles approached her. Mr. Harkles was ready to swear to that back as one he knew well. But the man proved to be carrying a tray—a servant, how dull! Taking her her after-dinner coffee.

Mr. Harkles became aware of trampling and confusion of noises overhead, and the strange yacht moved away from him. Yet she was moored! Mr. Harkles hurried up on deck. "Oh, confound the Terrier!" It was "Up anchor!" on the *Daydawn*. It was she that was moving. She was off. "Just when it's so lovely!" the ladies cried, clinging to the Terrier. "This exquisite spot, and that heavenly music! *Don't* take us away! *Do* let us go and call on them."

But the Terrier was adamant to their entreaties. "Impossible!" he playfully exclaimed. "Most partic'lar engagement—must keep it"—he embraced Lady Cruxhaven—"only just in time"—he patted Lady Ballard and Sarb on the head—"Salonica—Naples—Genoa," he shouted, perjuring himself in his haste indiscriminately, as he made off.

"Athens, then!" they screamed in chorus after him.

But the next evening they were again at sea. "There's nothin' to take us into Salonica," he had said. "We're not out of coal."

All that day there was hardly a word to be got out of him. The ladies asked Mr. Harkles what was the matter. Mr. Harkles at first said that it was just his tormenting way, but later he succumbed to his habitual bent, and surreptitiously whispered all that he knew and much more that he imagined, thus filling the ladies, who were hungry for scandal, with good things, and making them feel that they'd come in for something which they wouldn't have missed for the world.

That evening Red Ruin—modern siren that she was—to dissipate Lord Terry's gloom, had the happy idea of making it Sunday. He had not spoken to her all that day, but, on deck after dinner, she managed with songs celestial to take him out of himself, and stir his blood, and charm herself back into favour again.

"Come and sit beside me," he said at last, and she snuggled up to him, her arm through his, her head on his shoulder. This intimacy attracted no attention from the others. It was the usual thing under the circumstances.

Her singing and the soft, warm splendour of the night, had inclined them all to dreamful ease. For awhile, after she ceased, lolling on long chairs, they smoked their cigarettes in silent satisfaction. The yacht was going full speed, but so smoothly that there was only the regular beat of the screw to make them aware of the fact, and to that they were too accustomed to pay much attention, or it might have occurred to them that Lord Terry de Beach was taking them somewhere in a desperate hurry.

Lady Ballard and Sarb broke the silence. "It's very sweet this—this quiet, don't you know," she began softly. It surprised her that she found it sweet to lie there contented with never a man about, for neither Lord Terry nor Julius Caesar Harkles counted; and she tried to analyse her sensations. "I feel 'rocked in the cradle of the deep' kind of thing, and the screw, the way it beats, seems to be saying something—I can't tell what."

"It's always sayin' somethin', all sorts of things," said Lord Terry de Beach. "I make 'em out sometimes. To-night it's

sayin'—it often says it: 'Life is—short. Life is—short. Life is—short.'"

"I don't like that," Red Ruin exclaimed with a shiver.

Mr. Harkles scented the wrath to come in the offing. "I never allow the thought of death to trouble me," he broke in cheerfully. "Live as long as you can, I say, and when you must die, die like a man."

"Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once,"

Lord Terry muttered. "But it's not death, it's after death the judgment that's the bother. D'ye ever pray, ladies?

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of."

Lord Terry mumbled this, as if prayer were a delicate matter he hardly liked to mention.

"But why be afraid of death?" Red Ruin cooed with voluptuous unreserve:

"Heard'st thou not that those who die
Awake in a world of ecstasy?
That love when limbs are interwoven,
And sleep when the night of life is cloven,
And thought to the world's dim boundaries clinging,
And music when one beloved is singing
Is death—"

"What's that, my lady, what d'ye say?" Lord Terry asked with animation.

But Princess Taxidos maliciously quenched his enlivenment with a reminder of the wrath to come, calculated to act like a slap on the raw. "What does poetry prove!" she jeered. "And what's the use of prayer! It's after death the judgment, you know, and it's your misdeeds that are to be taken into account, not your——"

Bang-smash, bump-bump, lurch, chairs sliding into scuppers—"Oh!" "Oh!" "Oh!" Paralysis. Then back—slowly. Decks level again. Sigh of relief.

Lord Terry was first on his feet. "She's righted," he said quietly. "Keep cool, ladies."

Princess Taxidos exhaled a mouthful of smoke. "Does he think we are going to scream?" she asked the circumambient air.

"Hold my great toe, rub my little finger with brandy, I feel faint," Red Ruin mocked as she gathered herself up.

"He must cry hard who would frighten the devil," Lord Terry flung at them, and went forward grinning.

"We've struck!" cried Mr. Harkles, and, with great presence of mind, made for the nearest life-belt, tore it down, and began to put it on—on himself.

"Gallant Harkles to the rescue of Julius Caesar," Princess Taxidos reflected. "Shall we—help him?"

"We will," Red Ruin said firmly.

Lady Ballard and Sarb's gipsy face dimpled with merriment.

They might have been going to the bottom next minute for all they knew, but that was a secondary matter to which they could attend—if they had time—when they had settled with Mr. Harkles. Innate in the breed of all three was devilment—and the scorn of cowardice.

Mr. Harkles, with his back to them, was struggling with the life belt, trying to get it on over his coat.

"That's not the way, dear," said Red Ruin, seizing him from behind.

"I'll show you," cried Lady Ballard and Sarb, snatching the life belt from him.

"Off with all superfluous clothing!" Princess Taxidos shouted.

Mr. Harkles struggled and protested. "Ladies! ladies! Beyond a joke——"

But, taken unawares, he was no match for three strong young women. In a minute they stripped him to his shirt and pants, tied him up in knots in the life-belt, noted the decorative effect of shirt-tails as a frill to a cork jacket; then, "Overboard with him!" and overboard they tumbled him plump into the water, and there left him bobbing alongside until some of the ship's company came to the rescue.

The yacht lay-to. A boat put off, pulled about for awhile in the crescent moonlight, returned to the yacht, was hauled up to the davits, and the screw began to thump again, cautiously.

"It was a submerged derelict we crashed into," Lord Terry explained to the ladies, who had waylaid him on deck. "We've

marked her, and I'll notify the authorities to have her blown up. The French fleet'll likely be in Golfe Juan."

"We've come at a fine bat if we're anywhere near Golfe Juan," Princess Taxidos observed.

"The *Daydawn*, madam, is one of the fastest boats afloat," said Lord Terry. "Urgent private affairs are takin' me home in a hurry."

"The same engagement you had to keep at Salonica, Naples, and Genoa, I suppose," Red Ruin sneered.

"The same," he answered unblushingly.

Lady Ballard and Sarb looked about her. "What's the damage?" she asked.

"On board? Oh! We'll make Cannes all right, I think," he replied.

"I'm going below," Red Ruin snapped ill-humouredly.

"Best thing you can do," he rejoined.

"Good-bye, then," she snapped, "in case you don't have time to see us again."

"Oh, I'll see you again, I fancy," he answered indifferently.

She flounced off. Lady Ballard and Sarb had already gone. Princess Taxidos faced him alone, stalwart and determined.

"Where shall I be of most use, in the stoke-hole or at the pumps?" she asked.

He looked at her comically. "You'd find it most amusin' in the stokehole, I should think," he said.

"I am not fooling," she answered tartly; "neither am I a fool. One of the fastest boats afloat, and in a hurry, is making about seven knots an hour."

He glanced overboard as if struck by this statement. "We *are* limpin' a bit," he owned.

"And the pumps are going and the boats are swung out," she continued her indictment.

He waited.

"And you treat me like a child!"

"I was tryin' to treat you with consideration," he said. "What a' you at?"

"I am for feeling alive as long as I can," she said. "Give me something to do—something worth doing."

"There's Harkles, poor chap!" he said. "How could you, the three of you! What'll you be at next!" But he spoilt censure by laughing in the middle of it. "Go and rub him down."

"The Most Honourable the Marchioness of Ballard and Sarb

was cast for Ministering Angel in this Comedy," she retorted.

"Ah!" he meditated. "Well," he recommenced without banter, "if you could gag those squawkin' servin' women so that they'd have to hold their tongues if they lost their heads, and have all ready to land the lot of you, it might be a help."

"We are to be ready to take to the boats at a moment's notice," she flung at him. "Talk sense to me, man dear, do!"

"Women are incalculable," he muttered.

"This one can be reckoned on," she gave it him.

They looked hard at each other, hostile at first, then she smiled and held out her hand.

He took it, his mind working. "I begin to understand you, Princess," he said at last, giving her hand a little squeeze. Letting it fall, he walked away.

"And would you believe it, sir," he closed his subsequent account of the incident, "she had those blasted females in marchin' order in ten minutes, and then, by the Lord God! she took her turn at the pumps till we beached. You should have seen her stride among the men, and give the shirkers hell and blazes! They were for takin' to the boats, some of 'em. But she'd not have that, not she! 'It'll be overboard with the one that's not for savin' the yacht,' says she, 'and a swim ashore.' I don't know if she's a woman or what, but I'm damned if she isn't a very present help in time of trouble."

5

The gallant old man spent the night in blissful unconsciousness of his sinful self, but in dire anxiety for the safety of the females he had in his keeping, the yacht included. Fortunately, the weather held good. In the early hours of the morning, he knocked at Red Ruin's stateroom door. "Lady Cruxhaven!" he called authoritatively.

"Yes," she answered, opening the door. The yacht had a heavy list and she had to hold on to the jamb to keep her balance. She looked neat and cool and fresh, as if she had been waiting, ready dressed, to land in the ordinary way.

"So we're still afloat," she said, smiling. "I thought it was all up with us when we listed."

"We'll beach directly," he said. "We couldn't make Cannes.

I must stick to the yacht myself, but there's Harkles to see you safe anywhere. And what I've been thinkin', my lady, is that you won't be in funds for an unexpected journey."

She smiled innocent inquiry up at him.

"So if you'll do me the honour to make me your banker in this emergency, you'll gratify me."

"Oh, you are too kind!" she exclaimed. "But is there any necessity?"

"It depends on how much you have in hand," he said.

"Oh, as to that!" and she laughed.

"You'll do me the honour, then?"

"I suppose I must," she said, keeping up the show of reluctance. "How considerate you are! A thousand thanks!"

He looked her in the face, a peculiar look. Except for that look, which was involuntary, the farce was well played. In the first triumph of success, she thought to herself: "The old brute is a gentleman *au fond.*"

"I'll set Harkles to do courier and see to money matters," he concluded. "Leave everything to him. *Au revoir!*"

She had expected a cheque, a large compromising cheque, perhaps even a love-letter. It took her some minutes to recover her composure. But after anathematising the "gentleman *au fond*" for "a detestable, ugly, used-up, miserly, old curmudgeon," she had done with him for the moment, and was looking immediately ahead. She would still have her debts to face when she got home, and that ever-recurrent problem—Cruxhaven. His attitude towards her and life in general was the same, detached; he studied both with interest and high intelligence, but without ulterior motive apparently, since nothing practical resulted. But the question, the *amari aliquid* in her cup of pleasure, which haunted her, was how long would he continue in that stay? The terminus of the *train de luxe* by which she travelled was a great gulf, and she knew it. She need never reach the terminus, of course; there were stoppages on the way. She knew that, too. But then she would have to change trains and get into a slow one. Rather than that, the gulf! Besides, there was a way out of the gulf. Women who had taken the plunge were to be met with again in Society. The thing to make for was a return ticket.

6

Mr. Harkles had been in no danger in the water, but the ducking and the indignity, the realisation, too, of the damaging fact that, with women on board, it would appear that he had thought of his own safety only, and fear of the consequences when the tale was told, prostrated him. He lay in his berth and groaned, not caring now if they did go down. For it was not cowardice that had prompted the craven act, but egoism; the unreasoning impulse to save his most precious treasure, the thing he lived for and habitually thought of first, himself. But how to get out of it? How to make it plain to the Land and Leisure Club that he had really shown commendable presence of mind and done the right thing coolly under the circumstances, were questions that tormented him to the verge of delirium. The taciturn steward rubbed him down with brandy and dosed him with the same, hot. Lady Ballard and Sarb was in and out of his cabin all night trying to reassure him and persuade him to dress, and over and over again he explained to her that at his age (the allusion to his age showed how desperate he knew his case to be), he could not have helped the ladies for any length of time without a life-belt once they were in the water, but he would not get up. When the vessel listed she insisted that they were going to the bottom. "What's going to the bottom!" he exclaimed. "Going to the bottom is death. And death is a falling asleep after more or less unpleasant sensations, followed by a blessed eternity of unbroken oblivion. Tell them that Julius Harkles died like a man!"

"I'll tell them that Julius Harkles died like a frightened rat in a trap," she threatened. "Or else we'll dress you and carry you up ourselves, and then I shall explain that we women had to do it because you were too paralysed with fright to help yourself. Now, get up, dear man! I'm off to send Cheeseman to valet you."

And at last, with a deep groan, Mr. Harkles arose.

The Terrier himself rounded him up, so to speak, the last thing, in the privacy of his cabin.

"I've a word of warnin' for you, Mr. Harkles," he began. "You saw the *Iphigenia* with a lady on board."

Mr. Harkles smirked wanly.

"Well, look here. You've got to escort the ladies to wherever the devil they want to go——"

"Oh, surely you'll let me stand by you and the yacht!" faithful Harkles exclaimed. He knew what it cost to escort ladies who were for honouring you in that way.

"You've got to escort the ladies to wherever the devil they want to go," Lord Terry repeated doggedly. "I'll foot the bill." He noted the relief on Mr. Harkles's countenance, and grinned appreciation of his own shrewdness. "You'll be in town before I am, and this is what I've got to say to you: If you breathe a word to a livin' soul about the *Iphigenia,* I'll smash you. The ladies'll tell on you for sure, but it's what I say or don't say that'll make the difference to you; and if there's any scandal afoot about the *Iphigenia* when I get back to town, I'll know who started it, and I'll make you wish yourself in hell. I'll stick that cork jacket on to you for life, with your shirt-tails for a frill to it, and your shanks in silk pants, and then where'll you be? If you tell a livin' soul; and I'm certain to hear of it if you do."

"But the ladies saw the *Iphigenia,*" Mr. Harkles gasped.

"The ladies didn't know it was the *Iphigenia,*" said Lord Terry de Beach. "If they know now——!" He shook his fist in his Julius's face, and left him, inwardly cowering.

CHAPTER VII

ELLA LEFT TO HER OWN DEVICES

There are few circumstances in which it is not best either to hide all or to tell all.—La Bruyère.

1

Ella returned to town an altered woman—not in appearance. Her superb physique made light of the shock of her adventure. But in the depth of her there was a difference.

At the time when the Duke was racked with forebodings for the safety of his dearest in the storm that raged on the day of the inquest, the *Iphigenia* was gallantly holding her own against the mighty onslaught of turbulent seas. And Ella, clinging to a stanchion, fearlessly facing the mountainous waves, oncoming

in battalions to the attack, crested with snow, her mind in a like boiling turmoil, fought for her sanity as the yacht fought for her life. She was torn by the horror of bloodshed, torn by that suggestion of the Duke's that she had been in no danger, which made the deed unjustifiable—though she knew better! She knew better! . . . It was awful to have taken a man's life, but the wretch, the wretch—— Oh, she wanted to kill him over and over and over again!—Yet she did not want him to be dead. She would have had him alive to repent and live a life worthy of his death, for he had died bravely—"Died like a gentleman." When she thought of him dying she was torn with compassion, but when she thought of the trap he had set for her, when she thought of the insult of his whole attitude towards her, rage killed compassion. And why should she be tormented now? A man who kills another in self-defence is not doomed to remorse; the whole world exonerates him. There had been no question of choice for her at the moment. She fired of necessity, a cruel necessity for her. "The woman pays." Gods and men would have her pay because she was a woman—the injustice of it! . . . Must her peace of mind be forever destroyed, her life blighted, because she had been threatened with dishonour by a villain and had had only the one way of escape open to her? Must she pay such a penalty for his villainy? No! The modern woman in her resented the injustice. She vowed that she would not pay. The debt was not hers and she defied them all, Gods and men, to make her pay it.

But she had to pay in suffering, though she won through out of the turmoil of her mind, the complication of her feelings, self-exonerated.

It was by work that she saved herself. Even before the storm had abated she courageously summoned her strength of mind to oppose a fury of work to the wearing thoughts that would have conquered her in idleness. For awhile she kept the men who were responsible for her safety on tenterhooks by her reckless braving of the danger on deck. When at last she went below it was to overhaul the itinerary the Duke had prepared for the voyage and alter it to please herself. The Captain had had his orders, but she would not have been the Winged Victory if she had not insisted on being Captain of the Captain, and gone where she pleased. Consulting the map, her eye was caught by the names of ports which meant lace to her mind, chances she had not yet had and might never again have, of

picking up rare specimens, and she had put into every one of these ports. Her idea was to ransack the shops for lace, but she had no need to trouble herself. Lace came to her as to a magnet. The sumptuous English yacht with the beautiful solitary lady on board excited inquiry, and what she was after soon became known. The news even preceded her, and she was met on her arrival by lace vendors. She bought old ragged lace to be made whole again and restored to its pristine beauty; lace which extravagant ladies were driven to sell for greed of gold to spend on sensual pleasures; lace which mothers sacrificed to obtain the means to start their children in the world; lace that had been loved and hoarded up as too precious for use, and left and forgotten, until some uncultivated legatee chanced upon it and had "the dirty old rubbish" sold for what it would fetch, to make room for the kind of trash in which the eye of ignorance delights. She discovered and secured precious fragments which had been given to children to cut up for their dolls' dresses. Noble ladies, hard up, or avaricious, stole off to the yacht with yards of lace concealed about them, and dealers came—some impudently with meretricious imitations, who were made to regret the adventure. Ella, helped by her experienced maid, whose eye for the right thing was almost as good as her own, spared no pains. Every offer was considered, and the result was a harvest of lace both rich and costly. The Duke, informed of her independent proceedings, said "Extravagant puss" to himself with his habitual smile indulgent; and Mr. Bosc, who had been sore troubled by her sudden departure, was relieved to find that lace was the object of it, and the quite natural explanation.

She was at last heading for the Isles of Greece when the *Daydawn* first sighted her. Her intention had been to visit the Italian ports by the way, but she changed her mind and decided to take them on her return. A sudden strange urging had come to her that night at Cannes to make for solitude, for which she had originally craved. She was importuned by the picture the Duke had created in her mind when he promised that she should go "Where the sun shines, and the water is clear and blue as a polished sapphire; 'where lutes in the air are heard about, and voices are singing the whole day long'; and there are flowers." . . . "Music and the Isles of Greece," sang in her heart incessantly. The yacht had merely put into Cannes one evening for supplies, and was off again the first

thing next morning, as Lord Terry de Beach had hoped. When he saw her she was facing forward as to the accomplishment of her heart's desire. It was as if there away over the glad waters were the time and the place. She stood poised for the event. And it was there, lying in her long chair on deck, the romantic mystery of the shadowy coast appealing to her by the dim light of the crescent moon, and her spirit steeped in music, that certainty came to her—the certainty that Melton was true; that there was a satisfactory explanation of his apparent desertion; that he would return to her. The faculty in herself which she disliked and distrusted, and had habitually striven to suppress, is one to triumph in such surroundings. The conditions were right and it had triumphed, for the last time for many a long day. And for once she did not reject the intimation because it was intuitive, although she knew of no single fact to confirm it. She found it in herself, knowledge positive and not to be questioned, and it did not matter how it had been acquired. She knew—that was enough. There was no need to bestir herself. She might revel to her heart's content in the lonely loveliness about her, and indulge her every whim on the way back, for the time was not yet.

She left the yacht at Marseilles and spent a week in Paris to superintend the making of some dresses she had designed to wear at her receptions, for the purpose of showing her lace. But the days began to drag there. Being alone in a crowd, especially for one who is accustomed to be courted, is not the same thing as being alone with nature. Beveridge and her maid were under strict orders to attend her wherever she went, and she felt the double escort irksome, feared it looked ostentatious, as if she, the Lace Girl, were posing as a person of consequence. But she resigned herself. Her disobedience that night when she had broken the rule that she was to go nowhere alone, had taught her a lesson; also, the attention her appearance attracted in the streets of Paris made her painfully aware that she stood in need of protection. She hoped to avoid acquaintances, but one day at the dressmaker's she encountered Rex Ruin, Princess Taxidos, and Lady Ballard and Sarb and saw Mr. Harkles in the distance waiting for them in the anteroom.

"Oh, you *darling!*" Lady Ballard and Sarb exclaimed, seizing both her hands.

"Beauty being adorned, I suppose!" said Princess Taxidos.

"With *carte blanche* to spend, no doubt," said Red Ruin. "It's well to be beauty without a husband!"

"Spending, in my case, is business, and I must attend to it. Excuse me, please," Ella said hastily, and made her escape.

And, oh, it was good to be in London again! As the train approached the terminus her heart expanded. How grand it all was—the Thames a shimmer of polished steel, the great, grimy buildings, the huge iron girders of the railway bridge; the strong, confident faces and fine physique of the people, a dominant race, for sure, crowds of them, unexcited, busy without fuss, self-respecting, and in their ugly, ill-made clothes, commanding respect. She felt that she had never realised England before. What did Shelley mean by "Homeward, which always makes the spirit tame"? Why, it is in the home-coming that the joy of travel culminates! Charing Cross and the carriage waiting in the courtyard, and the horses—what beauties! She had seen no turnout in Paris that she would have exchanged for her own. And her coachman and carriage groom daring to smile a welcome as they took her in charge, that was good, too! Beveridge and the maid, released, had disappeared with the luggage. She thought of her first arrival at a London terminus and of Mr. Bosc. By the way, where was Mr. Bosc? She knew now that it was not customary for the head of an eminent firm to meet business women at railway stations, still she had expected Mr. Bosc to meet her, though perhaps it was just as well. But there was Mr. Bosc at her elbow, before thought flashed to a finish, his face twitching nervously, his hand held out.

"Mr. Bosc late, for a wonder!" she exclaimed gaily.

"I was not late," he answered, gravely precise. "I was misinformed. I went away because I was told that the boat-train would be half an hour late. It came in punctually."

"It *is* good to see you again!" she exclaimed. Everything was "good" just then. "You'll come home with me?"

"To the door, with pleasure," he answered, seating himself beside her in the carriage.

Mr. Bosc thought of their first meeting, too. He saw a change in her, not merely the gradual change which he had witnessed in all its stages as it took place, from expectant girlhood to experienced young woman. He detected another sort of change. He could not define it, but he felt that it was not a change for

the better. Something had gone; was it her exquisite serenity?

"To judge by your appearance, the holiday has done you good," he mildly complimented her.

She smiled. "But I shall be glad to be at work again," she said, "not that I have been idle. I have brought home piles of lace."

"You were lace-hunting, then. I wondered what you had gone for so suddenly, alone," he replied, slightly accentuating the word "alone."

She thought he was hurt because she had not required his escort as on her previous lace-hunting expedition. "I needed to be alone," she said. "You understand, I am sure. One does need to be alone sometimes—out of the crowd."

"You have been alone then the whole time?"

"Until this moment," she answered.

Mr. Bosc sighed a sigh of relief. He had not been able to make sure, until now, that she had been alone the whole time.

The Duke, who had been hurt because Ella still spoke of the little farmhouse as "home," after all the pains he had taken to make her a home of her own, would have been satisfied had he known how her heart warmed to the Corner House, as she neared it. She looked it over as Mr. Bosc handed her from the carriage, and exclaimed: "How good it is to be back again!" And her thanks to him for meeting her were perfunctory, her leave-taking from the doorstep casual.

"My mother sent her love. You will spend Sunday with us, we hope," were his parting words.

"My love to her, and thank you both very much. I must leave it open, though, if you'll let me. I'll write. Good-bye!"

Had she no more need of him? Mr. Bosc, his lean figure, as always, quietly well-dressed, turned away, nose twitching, eyes blinking, his usual self in appearance, but at heart the most sadly disappointed, eminently successful professional man in London. She was for setting him aside, her best, most disinterested friend, on whom she had hitherto affectionately relied; that was the change he had detected, so he took it. But no! he loyally swore. He would not be set aside. Let who might come between them, he would be there, to save or to avenge her. Heroics flourish in every sort of breast, provided it is in the heart that the seed is sown.

The Argus-Eyed and Miss Hildenborough came running out of the showroom to receive her, and Pecky Tim, on the broad

grin in the background, held a small bunch of white flowers to his lips.

"Oh, how good it is to be at home with you all again!" Ella exclaimed, amid a general handshaking. "How have you been?"

"It's been all body and no soul while you were away, Miss Banks," said the Argus-Eyed.

"Impossible!" Ella answered, smiling. "The soul of goodness is wherever you are, Mrs. Pilbeam."

"Oh, get away!" said the Argus-Eyed, in great delight.

Pecky Tim presented his flowers. "White heather, lidy, that's for luck," he said.

"Why, Timothy, did you get these for me yourself? Well, you are kind!" said Ella, laying her hand on his head.

"They're for luck, you know, lidy," Timothy reiterated, that being the important point, which she didn't seem to have grasped.

"Let us hope that they will bring us all good luck!" Ella exclaimed, waving the flowers round the circle. "Suppose we each wear a bit, Timothy? May we?"

"You do me proud," said Timothy, bowing with his hand on his heart.

Ella fastened a bit onto his coat, and distributed sprigs to the others. "Now let us hope for luck!" she exclaimed.

"Let us pray," the Argus-Eyed muttered.

But Miss Hildenborough heard her. "Whatever were you throwing cold water for, Mrs. Pilbeam?" she wanted to know when they were alone again. "It's like as if you were afraid of something."

"Is praying 'cold water,' Miss Hildenborough?" the Argus-Eyed asked tartly. "If you think so now, you didn't once. And as to being afraid—who knows?"

"I know I want my tea, and that's what's the matter with you," said Miss Hildenborough, and led the way.

Ella, in her sitting-room, stood stock-still, her eyes on a new grand piano. She uttered a long, low "Oh-h-h!" of delight. "The thing I've been longing for, one of my own!" she exclaimed. "He always knows!"

She looked into the showroom. The setting sun shot beams across it, brightening the gilding, showing up garland and *corbeille* in high relief; vivifying bare-footed Boucher shepherdesses, clad in satin, and their swains, on the painted panels;

making the hanging lustres a dazzle of rainbow tints, and showing them reflected at infinite depths in the polished floor. It was the moment when the Eighteenth Century lived in the room again, but for once the fascination failed of its effect upon Ella. She remembered, but she did not feel. Standing there in the deep doorway, she would fain have passed the threshold of time again, and met her compeers of two hundred years ago on the other side of the dividing line; but the neglected faculty would not obey her will, the gift she had despised and rejected was withdrawn.

On her way upstairs she stopped on the first landing to look into the reception-rooms. Doors and windows were wide open, the blinds were up; the impression of luxury, of light and air and order, was immediate; but it was order with the kind of comfortless bareness that comes of disuse and disappears when rooms are occupied. Ella had always acted as self-constituted custodian rather than as owner of the house. The haunting impression by which she had been pursued of the Brabants themselves as still in a kind of possession, had insensibly produced this effect. She had taken it, absurdly, that they cared for their property still, as if immaterial spirits could be troubled by the conditions of tables and chairs, and, inconsistently, while refusing to believe in any influence as an intimation from another world, in her care for their possessions she had acted scrupulously to the contrary effect, intuitively considering their feelings. The house was kept as though prepared for the return of the former owner at any moment. She had been fully conscious at times that efforts were being made to communicate with her; it had even been borne in upon her that those efforts were protective and she herself the object of them; but with the full force of her strong mind she had fought against the impression as contrary to all intellectual experience, therefore the consequence of a morbid physical condition which must be guarded against, or worse would come of it.

But Ella had grown as the result of her terrible adventure. The shock of it had shaken her pride of intellect. She was no longer content to be merely a thinking, purposeful, human being. She was troubled with a yearning in her inmost self, an involuntary reaching out for something undefined, that made her restless. It is not usual to be aware of subtle changes in ourselves, something must occur to mark the difference, and Ella was less sensitive on the subject than she might have been

because she habitually avoided introspection as a weakness. She did not therefore ask herself why a flash of the spiritual illumination which she had hitherto disliked and held in check would have been welcome now, but, although she entered the reception-rooms for the purpose of seeing that all was in order there, she made for Lady Alicia's portrait with but a casual glance round by the way.

The picture hung in a conspicuous position in the third, or small drawing-room, as it was called, and was in full view from the entrance to the suite when the folding-doors of communication between the three rooms were open. Ella had been wont to argue herself out of the feeling that there was some special significance in the eyes when they met hers, that they held a message for her which they were vainly trying to convey to her understanding; but she would fain have recaptured the feeling and could not. The eyes said no more to her now than they said to the servant who dusted the gilded frame with a feather brush.

Downstairs in the brightness of the setting sun she had felt only commonplace reality in the beautiful ball-room, and here again was commonplace reality. It was bald, though, after her past experience, to see these eyes only as the eyes of a well-painted portrait, kindly eyes, forever fixed in a set expression. But it was what she had desired all her life, to see things truly with the outward eye as they are, not realising that the outward eye sees the surface only. Intellect skims the surface; it is reserved for the spirit, whose advances she had slighted, to plumb the depths. She had taken her fate into her own hands when she preferred intellectual ascendency to spiritual enlightenment, and now she found herself left to order her life as best she could with the help of the limited finite faculty on which she, who might have invoked the higher power to her aid, had chosen to rely. The Brabants who had passed over might still be about her striving to communicate from the other side, but she no longer sensed their efforts. Her pride of intellect had erected a barrier between them. She herself had closed and locked the door that separated them, and had lost the key.

It was this that she felt—a chilly sense of loss—as she turned away from the picture. But as her common sense assured her that she had lost nothing, she set the feeling of dissatisfaction from which she had begun to suffer down to

fatigue, and decided that it had been a mistake to look at anything before she had had tea and her bath and a rest.

2

Her feeling next day was that she must hurry, that there was much to be done and little time to do it in; and she, who had been so unhasting in her ways, began to hustle herself—mentally first of all. She wanted to do a number of things all at once. It was as if she had lost confidence in everybody and must see to every detail herself. Miss Hildenborough had charge of the lace. It was her business to catalogue it and arrange it and be ready to produce the morsel asked for at any moment, and she had never made a mistake. The new purchases were handed over to her and she set to work, but half a dozen times in the morning Ella interfered, and altered all her arrangements.

"Whatever's come to Miss Banks," Miss Hildenborough complained at last to the Argus-Eyed. "There's no pleasing her that was so easily pleased. I'm that disheartened I could cry."

"She's a bit excited, I can see; it's the journey. You must make allowances," said the Argus-Eyed.

Ella sat down to her own work in the window recess where she had spent so many tranquil hours watching and waiting; but the window recess had lost its charm, and the work did not seem worth while. She would go and see where Marguerite was putting her new dresses.

There was a card on the hall table. Beveridge had been told to admit no one until further orders. But the card said, "Mr. Julius Harkles." Mr. Harkles would have amused her. Why wasn't he admitted? Beveridge must learn to discriminate. If anybody else came—anybody she knew well—Mr. Drindon, Mr. Strangworth—he must ask if she'd see them. But nobody else came, and that first day was interminable. Where was the Duke? If only he would come! Would he? Towards evening her spirits rose. She had begun to feel sure that he would. She must dress. She would wear the old-rose velvet. No, the white satin. Stay, though—well, yes. The white satin.

When her toilet was finished her staid maid Marguerite stood off and surveyed her with a rather peculiar look.

"What is it?" Ella asked.

"Madam would not think it a liberty if I said?"

"Not if I ask you," said Ella.

"I was thinking that Madam is very beautiful. She looks like a young duchess to-night."

"You have your eye on one of my dresses," said Ella, laughing.

"Not at this moment," Marguerite answered frankly.

But Ella did not want to be a young duchess. That would mean losing the Duke prematurely, a catastrophe she could not bear to contemplate. The thought of him came to her now in a flood of affection. If the Duke had not been Melton's father, probably by this time Melton would have been deposed; but his was the power to place her close to the Duke, and, without realising it, she clung to him on that account as much as any.

Sitting at the piano, her fingers wandering over the keys, she looked forward to a time when perhaps she would only have to run into the next room to find the Duke, when they would be able to walk and ride and drive together; and work—that above all.

So, entering, in his noiseless way, the Duke saw her as he had pictured her, a shining figure in white satin and lace against the dark, bright mahogany of a piano; saw her in profile, her face upraised as though she were listening to her own music. For she was playing. It did not strike him at first as strange that she should be playing. When it did, in his surprise he uttered an exclamation.

Ella jumped up with a glad cry, and threw herself into his outstretched arms. "Oh, I am so happy!" she exclaimed, between two kisses. "If you had not come to-night I think I should have run out with Beveridge to search till I found you."

"I am welcome, then," he said, and pressed a final kiss on her forehead. Then he stood off and looked at her, but gravely. She expected the compliment of an approving smile.

"Is there anything wrong?" she asked.

"Wrong?" he answered absently. "No, dearest, no. What could there be wrong? I was only thinking. A finishing touch, you know."

"But I don't know," said Ella, in distress.

"Your neck, my dear," he answered, fumbling about his coat. "Ah, here it is!" He drew out a longish, shabby leather case, with a coronet and a date in nearly obliterated gold letters

stamped on it. "Your neck is bare. A finishing touch. Here it is!" He opened the case, and held up a string of pearls with a diamond clasp.

Ella stretched out her hand involuntarily, then dropped it and blushed.

The Duke laughed. "You are very much a woman, you know, Ella. All women of taste covet pearls."

"Oh, but you must not think me covetous!" she cried. "I wanted to look at the lovely thing."

He unclasped the necklet. "And I want you to want the lovely thing," he said, fastening it round her neck. "Now let me look at you."

It was a long look. "Complete," he said at last. "That was all that was wanted. How did you come by the design of that dress?"

"I took it from an old engraving," she said. "The date was seventeen hundred and something."

"And the date on this case is seventeen hundred and something. Dress right for the pearls. Did you know they were coming, and prepare for them, you witch?"

She took the case from his hand and looked at the date with interest. "Have you had it so long!" she exclaimed.

"Now, really, Ella! Look at me!" She looked without comprehending. "Do I look a hundred years old?" he asked.

"Oh, I didn't mean that," she protested.

Then they both laughed, and she said she would like to give him a kiss for each pearl, but would pay him in instalments so as not to tire his patience.

His eye was constantly on her that evening, with troubled intentness. Once he muttered one of his audible asides: "It makes it so much more difficult." She saw that he was disturbed about something, and tried to distract him. "All this time I am forgetting about the piano!" she exclaimed. "I don't know which was the greater surprise and delight, the piano or the pearls. The piano, I think, because it supplied a conscious want. I never thought of wanting the moon."

"Did pearls seem so high out of your reach, then?" he asked with his melancholy smile. "By the way," he went on before she could reply, "you were *playing* the piano. A Chopin prelude. Playing well."

"Did you think so? I am so glad! I've not had much time——"

"Twenty-four hours, you surprising girl! How have you done it?"

She enjoyed his amazement, and answered to prolong it: "I've worked"—giving him the secret of all her success. Ella was scornful of the School of "Heaven help us!" She had graduated in the other, the School of "Heaven helps those who helps themselves."

"But I didn't begin yesterday," she prattled on. "Mrs. Pratt had grounded me in music as in so many other things——"

They paid a silent tribute of affection to Ursula Pratt's memory. She had died while Ella was away.

"The piano-tuner came the day after my first arrival in town," she resumed; "and I interviewed him. He said the grand piano upstairs was a splendid instrument, but it wanted playing on badly, so I thought that was my opportunity, for nobody could play worse than I did then." The Duke pinched her ear in acknowledgment of this mild witticism. "I've been taking lessons from Herr Klopstock ever since—funny old thing, but he can teach! You see it comes easy to me"—she held up her beautiful, capable, supple hands—"a lace-maker. If you've been used to putting your finger on the right one of a hundred or two of bobbins when it is time to twirl it, finding your way about those big black and white keys is simple. And now I have this lovely instrument of my own, I shall do better."

"But the one upstairs is your own."

"Not my very own in the same sense," she said. He understood her. After a pause, he said: "Play to me."

Her music to both of them was a joy added to the happiness of those tranquil evenings.

3

Ella had expected to take up her life again just where she had dropped it; expected to hold her court and have it attended as before, only by what Mrs. Filmer Dabbs called "The best people." To begin with, though in change unchangeable, she had changed. The difference was on the surface; down in the depths of her she was the same. Her purpose was unalterable, but her immediate wants were other than they had been. The crowds which had hitherto been but a part of her business, she *wanted* about her now as part of her life. She wanted bustle

and excitement rather than the tranquil self-possession which had been her chief delight. Her self-sufficiency failed her. Monotony, which had been restful, was now irksome. She wanted people and talk to vary it, and she became more easily accessible to her public. Her spirits were high, but feverishly high. The day's work was a dance. Sometimes, when there were no clients in the showroom, she actually danced, to the great delight of Miss Hildenborough. She played wild music, too; dashing, brilliant war music, with a challenge in it. The experienced Argus-Eyed, though tolerant, shook her head. She was aware of the change, and, like Mr. Bosc, suspected that it was not a change for the better. The dance was not dignified; there was defiance in the wild war music with its challenge. It was like our Miss Banks was on the warpath, but why? It was never her way to be flaunting. The good woman became uneasy. "It's her youth maybe having its way," she said to her director, to whom she confided her motherly concern. He was a gentle, kindly old man, very patient, very human, with mild eyes opened wide on eternity; but a man of both worlds, distinguished in his office, accounted a saint in the Church, and a shrewd adviser whatever the trouble—though there were people who, noticing the mild eyes opened wide on eternity and not realising that eternity has its part upon earth, were unprepared for his shrewdness. "Gels are like that," the experienced Argus-Eyed pursued. "It comes to them when they should be building their nests with a mate. They don't know what they want, and so they riot round. But it's dangerous in her case. She's but a lone gel, in a fine position for the devil to set a trap for her."

"But she has you to watch over her," the priest answered, smiling benevolently.

"If I could come anigh her, Father," said the Argus-Eyed, conceding her own ability without false modesty; "but she's high and mighty; sweet, too, if you take me; but it's so far and no further, I do assure you. Mr. Bosc found that long ago, and Mr. Strangworth. There's not one as I knows that she'd bend to, unless it was yourself, Father."

The priest sighed and smiled. "I might make her acquaintance," he said, in a non-committal tone.

"If you would!" the Argus-Eyed exclaimed. "She's a good gel, mind you, I'm not saying. All those men at her feet, and never a look or a word. Self-respecting? I can tell you!

She's a great lady, that's what she is, proud as they make 'em. You'll not make me believe other if you was to tell me till you're black in the face."

"Great ladies have come of humble parentage before now. There was Holy St. Catherine of Siena, the daughter of a dyer- —"

"But if you could see her yourself," the Argus-Eyed broke in, setting the parentage of St. Catherine of Siena aside summarily, as irrelevant just then.

"I can see her," he said, suddenly making up his mind, but it was to relieve the good woman's. He was Mr. Bosc's Director, too, and had heard that, spiritually, the Winged Victory was as unimpressionable as her marble prototype.

But the change in Ella herself was not the only change which the Argus-Eyed had to trouble her. She was quick to observe a difference in Ella's *clientèle*. It was the more raffish element in Society that came now, came in crowds. Good Society, as distinguished from Smart Society, stayed away. Hitherto, Good Society, with its restraining influence had predominated; that influence withdrawn, Smart Society had it all its own way, and acted after its kind. This was the result of Mr. Harkles's indiscretion. He held his own tongue after his return, in terror of Lord Terry de Beach's vengeance, but there was no silencing the three ladies in whom he had confided. It came from them that the *Daydawn* had several times sighted the *Iphigenia* among "The Isles of Greece," where, as Mr. Harkles had not failed to mention by way of adorning his tale, "Burning Sappho loved and sang"; and no two-and-two was ever held to make four more obviously, whether you took it that the *Daydawn* was alive with mildly burning Sapphos, or that the *Iphigenia* only harboured one for safety's sake, because of the intensity of the flame. Society sprang upon the suggestion that the Winged Victory was not alone on the yacht, but suffered a rebound which upset its stomach. It was Good Gracious herself who altered the matter from "fishy" and "funny" to "a hard nut to crack," by telling everybody casually that the Lace Girl had had a bad nerve-breakdown from overwork. "So we sent her off in the yacht to recruit. Much better than a nursing-home, because there illness is in the whole atmosphere and always suggesting to you that you are ill yourself." This was the explanation of Ella's trip which had satisfied the Duchess herself, but as there was no questioning her as to the Duke's

whereabouts during Ella's absence, and she continued to turn her own back on the Corner House, her set thought it safest to follow her example. Lord Terry de Beach professed to know all about the Duke's movements during those halcyon yachting days. "Busy man, the Duke," he gave out at the Land and Leisure Club. "He puts me to shame. While I've been philanderin' in the sun, here has he been hard at work as ever, here, there and everywhere, helter-skelter, lookin' into things. That's Ninny, don't you know. John o' Groats to-day, and Land's End to-morrow, a different postmark on every letter."

"John o' Groat's House is a building near Duncansby Head, the Northern-most point of Great Britain. It is said to have been erected by John o' Groats," Mr. Strangworth informed them, with the look round which should have been over spectacles to match his didactic tone when he spoke with his air of a pedagogue addressing a class. But the youngsters knew old Gregor now; they had found him out, and he was politely requested not to be an old humbug. Lord Terry's humbug was differently received. It was not customary for them to wink intelligence to each other. When they were not taken in, they expressed it by silently casting their eyes up to the ceiling. Their eyes had gone up to the ceiling while Lord Terry was speaking. He understood, and, inwardly cursing his Julius, he fell upon him in his absence, so to speak, with the story of the cork jacket. Princess Taxidos and Lady Ballard and Sarb had mercifully held their tongues, but Lady Cruxhaven had already given Mr. Harkles away. She could never be relied upon to play the game fairly, whatever it was, or she would not have been "Red Ruin and the Breaking up of Laws." The story was therefore not new to the Club, but her version of it would have gone for nothing if the Terrier had contradicted it. Confirming it now in his rage, he effectually blasted his Julius, and the fiat went forth. Harkles was a beastly cad and coward, and must be barred.

But Ella Banks and the Duke—good Lord! Who would have thought it of either of them? The question proved that, although they had canvassed the possibility often enough, they had never really believed in it. Now they declared that if there were a woman in London they could have sworn was all right, it was the Winged Victory. But there you are! You can never trust a woman; they all have their price. The change in Ella's *clientèle*, which the Argus-Eyed had observed and de-

plored, was the result of this scandal. A woman in the position which Ella was supposed to have accepted is always an object of curiosity, especially to kindred spirits, amateurs of the most ancient profession in the world. She is studied for wrinkles. Her dress, her colouring, her mannerisms, become the fashion. If she has any peculiarity which adds to her charm, it is affected if it can be. The effect of her personality is atmospheric, and women of the highest probity, who may perhaps never have heard of her, unconsciously aped her. Blonde hair became black that season, and costumes copied from pictures and adorned with lace became the rage. The position was so generally accepted that it ceased immediately to be discussed. As when two people marry, the ceremony once over, the fact of their union is established and no further mention of it is necessary, so it went without saying that the Winged Victory was the mistress of the Duke of Castlefield Saye. Some few people did not believe it, and said so emphatically, but this made no difference, except that they were called silly fools for their partisanship, whom anybody could take in. As generally happens in such cases, the parties principally concerned were the last to hear of the scandal. Had Ella been in her normal state little things that happened might have caused her to suspect that something was wrong, in which case she would not have rested until she had sifted the matter to the bottom. As it was, she found the excitement for which she was craving in the crowds that came about her, and that was enough. On her reception days the showrooms overflowed, and the whole ground-floor had to be thrown open to accommodate the throng. Her own sitting-room had to be locked up to keep the inquisitive out. Princess Taxidos, Lady Cruxhaven, and Lady Ballard and Sarb, with the easy grace in helping themselves for which they were celebrated, took possession of the drawing-room upstairs, and held private receptions of their own.

"Why do you let 'em, Miss Banks?" the Argus-Eyed remonstrated. "The games they're up to! You'd think it was a children's party, the way they go on, such romping, and they not children, far from it, or I'd hold my tongue."

But Ella only answered carelessly: "What does it matter?"

But she had some ugly jars. Mr. Harkles, who, though barred by the men, went with the ladies everywhere as usual, startled her on one occasion. She always saw that swaying stay-lace when she saw Mr. Harkles, and greeted him with the smile

which he mistook for encouraging. He presumed upon it now.

"*I* saw you on the Duke's yacht, naughty!" he said archly, shaking his finger at her.

Ella drew herself up and stared at him in amazement.

"You're not going to deny it!" he exclaimed.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Harkles," she answered haughtily. "Why should I deny it?"

"Why, indeed!" he replied. "You might think yourself a lucky girl."

"I fail to understand you, Mr. Harkles; your tone——"

"My tone?"

"Your familiarity. I know you very slightly."

"Oh, come now, Miss Ella Banks, you are not *quite* a Duchess, you know!" he retorted offensively.

But the suggestion switched her mind from his manner. It seemed to her that something must have come out about Melton. But how could it, unless Melton himself had spoken? He might have! She turned her back on Mr. Harkles with a fast-beating heart.

Col Drindon came knocking at her sitting-room door, and walked in without permission. It was their first meeting since the fatal night in Brastaby's flat. That night's suspicion had cost him his self-respect. He felt that he had behaved like a cur and a cad, and he was prepared to abuse himself and plead for mercy. He was prepared for a cold reception, too, but it was one of Ella's quiet days. She had seen no one outside her own household as yet, and was walking up and down her sitting-room, at a loss for distraction. Anyone would have been welcome to vary the monotony; Col, an intimate, was particularly so. Skipping the unpleasant interval, her mind set her back in the old happy, tranquil days, when they had been as boy and girl together, and he was one of the joys of her success. The Brastaby incident was not more vivid to her recollection now than a disagreeable dream would have been. There was nothing to keep it alive in her mind; nobody mentioned it. Brastaby had been laid away with his ancestors, and before Brastaby had rotted, Brastaby was forgotten. "Educate men without religion, and you make them but clever devils," said the Duke of Wellington. Clever devils, male or female, may delight the head, but they make no appeal to the heart, and it is the heart that remembers.

Ella held out both hands to Col Drindon. Inexpressibly

touched, he grasped them, and covered them with kisses. "I was afraid you would not want to see me again," he said.

"Why not?" she answered brightly—then she remembered. "Oh, that," she said. "But you did what you could. I heard all about the inquest, of course. Where should I have been but for you? All that's over, however, done, past, forgotten. Sit down. I'm very glad to see you."

"How you take things, Ella!" he exclaimed. "I've been so unhappy about you. I was afraid you would feel——"

"What?" she encouraged him.

"Feel—queer, about it, don't you know."

"Queer? I don't understand."

"Remorse, that kind of thing, you know——"

"Like a murderer!" she interrupted indignantly. "But I'm not a murderer. It was an act of justice. I rid the world of a pest, and deserve to be rewarded."

"Well, I wouldn't apply to the authorities for a reward just yet, I think, if I were you. I agree, though," he added hastily, seeing her face cloud. "You were justified under the circumstances."

But Ella had lost her equanimity. The latent emotional possibilities in her, those central fires of her being so long banked-up by her self-control, had been disturbed and were liable to blaze out at a touch; the stirring in her of love or hate might at any moment cause a disastrous conflagration after their kind. It was anger that Col had aroused by his tactlessness. For one of her imperious spirit she was in a dangerous state. Col had come not only to make his peace but to press his suit. Lord Terry had dropped a hint which amounted to a warning, not to be so sure that there was nothing in the slander.

"What's the matter with the Duchess's explanation?" Col had caught him up indignantly.

"There's Ninny in every word of it," Lord Terry had rejoined. "The way he manages his wife is an example to husbands. She's nothin' but an echo. I could hear his blasted voice in all she said."

"Then she echoed the truth for once," said Col.

"I shouldn't have thought that anythin' short of a cataclysm would cause Miss Ella Banks a nerve-breakdown," the Terrier objected drily.

"It was a nerve-breakdown," Col insisted. "I give you my word of honour. I happen to know."

"Oh, very well," said the Terrier. "Of course, if you happen to know, there's no more to be said; but I should be better satisfied myself if I knew how you happen to know."

"That, unfortunately, I cannot tell you."

"Humph," said the Terrier.

It was Col's chivalrous intention to urge his suit because of the scandal. He had intended to use it as an argument, to prove to Ella that, without a husband, she would always be open to such vile attacks, and defenceless. But Ella would not hear another word from him on any subject. Had he come as the gay, inconsequent boy, her one playmate, who always amused her, she would have been glad of his company; but Col a grown man with a sense of responsibility, taking life seriously, and raking up unpleasant memories, only angered her.

"I must ask you to excuse me," she said, rising abruptly. "I have to be in the showroom. Good-bye."

She nodded to him over her shoulder, and left him standing there, disconcerted. He went away with a heavy heart, determined to see her no more for the present. She had evidently not recovered herself, but she would, given time; and then she would see that she had treated him badly, and be quick enough to atone. She was as generous as they make 'em. And it was all his fault. He shouldn't have mentioned that accursed scoundrel Brastaby. That was what had upset her, and he might have known it would.

Ella found the Argus-Eyed loyally holding on to her desk, but evidently ill.

"It's that rump-steak pudding for dinner," she said, with a pitiful attempt to be cheery. "I never can say no to it, but it can't abide me."

"Off to bed with you," said Ella, unceremoniously ousting her from her pulpit. "I'll keep shop."

"Well, there's nothing much doing," the Argus-Eyed allowed, and retired with a grateful heart.

Ella sat long at the high desk, undisturbed, her elbows resting on it, her face in her hands. She was steeped in contemplation, not thinking or trying to think. *"Where there is no vision, the people perish."* The words came to her, obsessed her, finally captured her attention. "Vision?" she asked herself. "Was it vision I had and have lost?"

She looked up and discovered Filmer Dabbs, junior, gazing at her with gloating eyes.

When there was a good thing going, it was the practice of the Dabbs family to try for it. It is arguable if the kind of things that seemed "good" to them deserved the epithet, but they had no doubt on the subject. Dabbs senior's advice to his son was always: "Suck up to the swells, my boy. They'll despise you, be prepared for that, but they'll countenance you if they find you useful and think you respect them. They like to have their superiority acknowledged; it helps them to appreciate themselves, which they couldn't do if nobody bore witness to their high and mightiness by bowing down before them. That fetches 'em, I can tell you; and I should know, after doing their dirty work for 'em for forty years. There's always an opening in High Society for an accomplished sycophant; and a professional snob who knows his business can make a good thing of it. You'll find a fellow like you attached to many a lordling, and it's the fellow like you that does the ordering. Why? Because it's the fellow like you that has got the brains. But don't you ever get it into your head that you've been promoted to be one of them. It's by being yourself that you'll get the upper hand. 'Sycophant' they'll call you, and 'snob' they'll call you, and don't you forget it. For it's only so long as you are 'sycophant' and 'snob' that you'll keep the upper hand."

Ella, from the first moment that his eyes lighted upon her, had appeared to Filmer, junior, to be a good thing going. He put it to his father. "What a man like me wants is a wife to back him up, or he won't get to the top of the tree—a woman like mother. You'd never have been where you are without mother. This Winged Victory, as they call her, has all the qualities to push a man on. She has social backing, she's all right herself, and there isn't a swell I know who wouldn't marry her if she'd have him."

"And she favours you?"

Filmer looked down modestly.

"Well," his father pursued reflectively. "I don't hold with a man marrying out of his sphere. There's home and happiness to be considered first. Your mother wants you to marry an aristocrat. I don't. An aristocrat spends your money, and treats you like dirt, and would make it hell for you, not home. You're what the aristocrats call cannal (*canaille*), and this girl, being cannal too, you'd make a pair in private life, like me and mother. I don't think you could do better."

But Filmer had found himself worse than discouraged at the

Corner House; he was ignored, and his wooing had lapsed in consequence. Ella had overawed him, and he was not keen until the scandal broke out and made her notorious. Notoriety was a loadstone to Filmer. In that he was one with the crowd from which he sprang. Beauty, without notoriety, did not appeal to his senses. It hardly existed for him in the persons of the obscure; but set everybody talking about a woman, and let the talk get into the papers, and he was attracted at once. It was not to beauty but to notoriety that he bent the knee. He was the sort of man who sends an offer of marriage to a murderess on trial for her life. To have his name associated in dishonourable connection with a notorious woman he would have lied away his immortal soul if any remnant of a soul had still survived in him. In Ella's case he foresaw that there could be nothing for it but an honourable offer. She was too highly protected for anything but marriage to tempt her. The difficulty was his father. Senior Dabbs's sharp practice in business was balanced by strict ideas of moral probity in private life. There was no obtaining his consent to the marriage of his only son to a girl who had not always been straight. Filmer therefore affected to believe the Duchess, and persuaded his father that the scandal would tell to Ella's advantage in the end. "When it's cleared up," he said, "there'll be such a reaction in her favour as never was. She'll be honoured on all sides to make up for the injustice done her now."

It was therefore with his father's benediction that he had come to press his suit at what he considered to be a favourable moment, because he supposed her to be feeling "down on her luck."

"You're surprised to see me," he said, when she looked up. "I dare say you can't guess what's brought me, because there are not many men who would have come under the circumstances, as I have to-day, to honour you with an offer of marriage. I don't beat about the bush, you see. I admire you. You're like a great lady. I'm dashed if you aren't, you're so cool and self-sufficient. I'm bound for the top of the tree, I am, and that's where you'd like to be, or I'm much mistaken. You've rather queered the pitch for yourself, you know, but I don't mind. You'd live down anything with your make-up——"

"Really, Mr. Filmer Dabbs," Ella interrupted, "this is the most extraordinary——"

"Now, don't commit yourself," he interrupted in turn, warned by her tone. "I'm not to be trifled with, and I'm generous. I don't mind anything that may have happened. Let bygones be bygones, I always say. I'd as soon marry a widow as not, or a divorcee over the left, provided I was the man. You're the woman I want, and if you know your own interest you'll jump at my offer. Do, do consent without beating about the bush. Think what a help you'd be to me!"

Filmer spoke as if the joy of helping him was all that heart could desire.

Ella smiled contemptuously.

"I offer you a man's head and a man's hand to help you up in the world," he continued, holding out a huge, flabby paw, at which Ella looked with disgust. "And my heart's as big!" he added, betrayed by the excitement of the chase.

"Surely you are not sober!" Ella exclaimed.

"On my word, I am," said Filmer. "I know what I am saying. I mean every word I have said."

She stared at him, at a loss for words. He made it easy for her.

"Say yes, now do, there's a dear," he pleaded.

"I say no, most emphatically," she replied. "Now go, please, at once, and do not come back again, *ever*—— Lady Coombes!" she broke off, and, jumping up, she stepped down from the platform with a happy change of expression.

Lady Coombes stood on the threshold. "I got here in time to hear that young man ask you not to commit yourself, *et cetera*, my dear," she said, "and of all the—— Well, I won't demean myself by putting what I think of him into words, for the only words for it are such as no decent woman could use. I've dropped in for tea, my dear, if you'll kindly give me some."

They left Filmer standing there disconcerted. Miss Hildenborough, who had approached from the far end of the room when she saw Lady Coombes, asked him mechanically: "What can I have the pleasure of showing you, sir?"

Filmer glared at her, jammed his hat on, and fled.

Lady Coombes had determined to support Ella. She took action in the matter when she heard that Ella was being barred by Society. Society, which resented her rejection of the advances it made to her wealth periodically, said she did it out of opposition. But Lady Coombes never wavered from the high opinion she had formed of Ella on their first acquaintance,

and would not hear a word against her. She believed the Duchess, and had come now to hear Ella's own account of her cruise, but in her great delicacy she refrained from alluding to the scandal.

4

Lady Coombes helped Ella to recover from her encounter with Filmer Dabbs, junior, and the next day she was more herself than she had been since her return. Smart Society was away at the races, and only a few casual visitors came to the house. These proved to be connoisseurs come to purchase. Among them was the old priest, the Argus-Eyed's friend and Director. He came in the afternoon, and Ella, attracted by his appearance, singled him out to attend to herself. His benign eyes searching for the best that was in her found it. There was friendliness in his gracious courtesy, and she felt it and responded. He made no pretence about the object of his visit. Man of both worlds, he knew when to be simple and direct.

"I am a stranger to you," he said, "but I hope I shall not remain so, for you are no stranger to me. I know all about you that the Boscs know and Mrs. Pilbeam, and I much wish to make your acquaintance, if I may."

"Then I know you, too, by name and fame," Ella responded. "You are Monsignor Caffany."

He smiled and bowed. There was a little pause. He waiting for her to take the lead, her prerogative, and also her habit, as he judged; she, considering how best to entertain him.

"I hope you are interested in lace," she said. "I have some that I should much like to show you. It is some I have never yet had the pleasure of showing. It is Church lace, and I keep it apart to return to the Church when the Church will take it."

"You are a Catholic, then," he said, surprised at this opening.

"I am catholic in my sympathies," she replied. "'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's' is law to me, and one I should delight to see scrupulously honoured."

She led him to a large Boulle cabinet with many drawers, which she unlocked. She showed him pieces of Venice point and Genoa pillow-lace, and of *point-coupé* filled in with thread needle-point lace, nun's work, pieces made exclusively for the service of the Church, with sacred emblems on them, the Lamb

and the Pelican. Albs of cambric, with needle-point about the skirts, neck, and bands; altar-cloths of fine linen, with exquisite borders of *point-coupé* filled in with lace stitches; altar borders, and chalice-veils. One of these, with dove and olive branch in the centre, she said was seventeenth-century work.

"I can hardly believe it," he exclaimed. "It looks so new. But none of the things you have shown me look as if they had ever been used."

"They looked very much used, some of them, poor things, when they first came into my possession," she said. "I had much mending to do, and washing, too. I am my own Lady Ancress. The Lady Ancress, or Anchoress, you know," she explained, seeing that he did not know, "was the ecclesiastical laundress after the dissolution of the monasteries. Her office was to keep the richly-laced Church linen in order. She was some poor worn-out nun, a lacemaker herself in her convent home, no doubt——" She broke off to show him some perfect pieces of *potten Kant,* "fond double." She explained that the flower-pot was a symbol of the Annunciation. One piece had on it the Angel Gabriel with lilies in his hand, and the Virgin Mary. In another there was an accessory vase for the lilies. She showed with other pieces how, as Romanism declined, the angel disappeared and the lily pot became a vase of flowers, and how finally the Virgin was omitted and only the vase of flowers remained. She treated the subject as she treated the lace, with tender respect. A Catholic who felt it had been sanctified by dedication and use could not have done more for it.

"Is there much demand for Church lace?" he asked.

"There would be, for its beauty and rarity, if I showed it," she answered. "But I only show it to connoisseurs who respect its dedication, and undertake to restore it to the Church if they purchase it."

"Surely you have a feeling——" he was beginning.

But she would not let him deceive himself.

"I always have a feeling about things which have been valued by others," she interrupted, largely generalising. "But in the case of Church lace, I have a special feeling for the workers and for their intention. There is half a century's work in some of these pieces of lace. As one nun went blind or died, another stepped into her place. Without intermission the beautiful work went on and was accomplished. Don't you think

such devotion deserves to be honoured by respecting the intention of the workers? But I honour more in it than the devotion of these nuns to the service of their God. I honour it as evidence of the saving grace in women generally. I mean the quality of self-sacrifice, of disinterested devotion. To say that a woman gives herself to good works is no figure of speech."

"So you give yourself to your work here, which is a good work, and should bring you a blessing," he said.

"The only reward perfect disinterestedness desires is the success of the work," she answered, smiling, and lightly evaded the personal note by changing the subject. "Life has lost a great deal that was beautiful both in character and appearance since women began to neglect their own wonderful little implement, the needle. For one thing, we have lost the source of strength that comes of a tranquil occupation. If I were the daughter of a great house, I should like to leave my descendants a legacy of beautiful work, to keep myself in touch with them. In many of our great families such work—done centuries ago, some of it—is piously preserved, a lovely link in the chain of their descent. Let me show you a piece of lace begun by the grandmother of the present Duke of Castlefield Saye."

She unlocked another cabinet, and took from it the pillow, with the lace still pinned to the pattern and the bobbins attached, which the Duke had lent her for exhibition and had left with her, telling her to keep it till he asked for it.

She unfolded the work. "See!" she said. "Isn't it exquisite? I can't do better myself, who am a lacemaker by trade. And it is the kind I love best to make, partly bobbin and partly needlepoint. Do you know the feeling it gives me when I look at it? A feeling of continuity, of a past behind and a future in front, which makes it worth while to do things, and to do them well."

Ella had turned to the priest as a flower turns to the sun, its sweetness and beauty drawn out. The Argus-Eyed questioned him with an anxious look as he passed out.

"Very interesting," he said, stopping a moment beside her desk. "I hope to come again."

The Argus-Eyed took it that "So far so good" was the purport of these ambiguous words, but time pressed, she feared, and she wished the good man's pace had been less leisurely. During the interview she had observed from her perch that he

was listening, not talking, and she suspected that he had said nothing important. She did not realise that nothing said could be as effectual as the man himself. For high spiritual power does not work by words; it has no need to be vocal.

When Monsignor Caffany withdrew, Ella found herself confronted by a middle-sized, capable-looking, pleasant-faced man, who, hat in hand, was offering himself for her inspection.

"I guess you don't remember me," he said, slowly enunciating each word *staccato,* so that each made good its full value, and at the same time proclaimed him an American to the English ear.

"Of course I remember you!" she exclaimed. "You were my first patron—in the hotel at Closeminster. That was my first public appearance as a vendor of lace. How kind you were! I remember you always, gratefully."

"It's not me you should be remembering," he said. "It was my wife that did that lucky deal. She'll be sorry not to have the pleasure of renewing the acquaintance. She elected to stay at home this trip."

"Alone!" Ella ejaculated.

He detected in her surprise insular prejudice against the avoidable separation of married couples.

"She sleeps well nights," he replied, with an immovable countenance. "I reckon she don't need me around doing guardian angel all the time. We heard of you in America. We should have known it was you without the lace, because there couldn't be two young women in the world at the same time answering to your description. We were mighty glad to hear you were up on a pedestal. I've a matter of a thousand dollars lying idle, which I propose to invest in lace for my wife, if you could advise me."

When the genial American left her, Ella retired to her curtained window-recess, and shut herself in. The encounter had fired her recollection with stirring thoughts. After that day in Closeminster, whither she had gone in despair to hawk her lace, she had set off to walk home alone at night across the desolate moors, but Adnam Pratt had overtaken her on the lonely road, and picked her up behind him on his horse, and galloped off with her in the moonlight—oh, but it was glorious! And Melton, driving himself home from somewhere in a dogcart, had come up with them and offered her a seat, and had driven on furiously because she refused to forsake her Good Knight

Adnam.[1] That was surely the time of her life! Nothing had equalled it since for pure delight. Could anything ever equal it again? The next time she saw Melton—she was sitting on a bank, the road in front of her, the sea beyond, and he came riding by, and sprang from his horse, and let the horse go—she covered her face with her hands—confusion, agitation, what a moment! Then Melton's brother Eustace, with Lena Kedlock, on horseback, surprised them, and Adnam rode up from the other direction. And Adnam had carried her off on his horse from Melton for the second time—that was a curious coincidence! And, next, Melton was gone—gone without a word. Then a blank . . . and her mind skipped to the Corner House. Gazing from the windows up and down the streets on either side, remembering the feeling of her long watch, the tranquil hours of contemplation, of untroubled expectation, she acknowledged that she had been happy in her waiting mood, the mood she had lost; the mood which she found herself sighing for now, which she was fain to recapture. And why not?

The curtains behind her parted and fell together again with a rattling of the rings. She turned. And standing there against the velvet background was the answer to her question, was Melton himself.

"Ella!" He caught her in his arms. "Ella!" He covered her face with kisses greedily. "Oh, Ella! This is out of hell into heaven!"

She was stunned by the surprise, by his impetuosity, and could only gasp, "Lord Melton!"

"*Lord* Melton, my own! How absurd!"

"I have never called you anything else."

"You must now, though." He feasted his eyes on her. "My beautiful! You're lovelier than I've been thinking you were, and I've been thinking you the loveliest woman on earth. You'd be the loveliest angel in heaven. But this is heaven. Say so, too. Say after me, This is heaven."

"This is heaven," she sighed, her head on his shoulder.

She welcomed him as protection, as relief, as joy, as fulfilment. Trouble and pain fell from her. Her long, long, loyal vigil had ended in bliss.

"But we can't talk here," he was saying. "This is the open air, the market-place. Where do you live yourself? In Aunt Ally's room, I bet. Come!"

[1] See *Adnam's Orchard*.

He dashed the curtains aside, drew her hand through his arm, and kept hold of it as he led her across the wide shining space to her sitting-room door. The Argus-Eyed was at her desk, Miss Hildenborough stood on the floor beside her. Ella, with the wild-rose flush on her cheeks, glanced at them shyly.

"You never saw her look like *that* before!" Miss Hildenborough commented, with restrained excitement.

She had seen him arrive and run up the steps and into the hall as if the whole place belonged to him; a tall, slender, elegant young man, just what she had expected. Pecky Tim, who was alone in the hall, eyed him with his head on one side like an inquisitive game cock.

"Where is she—your young lady?" the young man demanded imperiously.

It seemed to Pecky Tim that the gent was in a hurry and impatient, so Pecky Tim answered deliberately. Pointing with a jerk of his thumb backwards over his shoulder, he drawled: "Aw! She is in there be'ind them curtains, titivatin' 'er 'air"—Pecky Tim titivated his own by way of illustration—"ready waitin' for your lordship, my lord."

Beveridge returned to the hall in time to hear this impudence and to see the young man speed across the showroom and disappear behind the curtains.

"Who was that?" he asked sharply.

"I dunno."

"Why did you call him 'my lord'?"

"It pleases 'em when they ain't, and shows 'em I know my way about when they are."

Pecky Tim punctuated his shrewdness with a catherine-wheel and fled from the "clout on the 'ead" which Beveridge gave as guerdon for the unseemly performance, when Pecky Tim ventured "to try it on" in the hall.

The Argus-Eyed and Miss Hildenborough were amazed by the swift passage of the young man. They held their breath till he gained the curtains and disappeared. Then Miss Hildenborough, grasping as much of the Argus-Eyed's arm as she could hold in one hand, declared: "That's *him!*"

"I suppose you know you're pinching me with your *him*, Miss Hildenborough," the Argus-Eyed snapped.

"Snub me you may, Mrs. Pilbeam, which is what I have to expect," said Miss Hildenborough, relaxing her hold. "But

you don't alter it. That—is—*him*. I always said there was somebody——"

"Oh, many a thing *you* say," the Argus-Eyed shot at her, discomfited.

"And, what's more, he's none of your upstart trash, *that!* He's a great gentleman, a born aristocrat," Miss Hildenborough decided with enthusiasm.

"You might say she was too, to look at her," said the Argus-Eyed, intent on opposition.

"Never in this world would I say that our Miss Banks was a gentleman," Miss Hildenborough rejoined emphatically.

This cleared the air and peace with laughter ensued. Then they waited. They just had to wait, there was no pretence about it. They could do nothing else.

"I feel like joy-bells!" Miss Hildenborough declared during the interval, her eyes on the velvet curtains. "My heart does beat."

"I should suppose so," said the Argus-Eyed, drily.

But cold water could not quench Miss Hildenborough's delight in High Romance. "I saw it in his face when he alighted at the door, I was looking that way," she pursued; "'the light that never was'—now, where was it?"

"I thought you said it never was," the Argus-Eyed objected ironically.

"It was somewhere, of course," Miss Hildenborough answered, intent on finding the illusive image. "'The light that never was on'——"

"—Was always turned off, I should say, like the gas when the meter's been taken away," the Argus-Eyed snapped her up.

"Mrs. Pilbeam, your soul is lacking."

"Like your sense," the Argus-Eyed hit out, impolitely.

But Miss Hildenborough's eye was still turned inward, searching for the place on which the light never was, and the insult failed to disturb her.

The appearance of the young pair arm-in-arm exceeded her highest expectation. "I felt like curtseying to the ground," she added to her comment on Ella's shy glance. "Talk of the transit of Venus!"

"You'll please not talk of improper persons to *me!*" said the Argus-Eyed.

"Did you see he'd got hold of her hand as proud as a peony?" Miss Hildenborough gushed unchecked. "If he'd been a knight

in shining armour he couldn't have looked more like it. I never was so thrilled."

"Shut up, you fool, they'll hear you," said the Argus-Eyed.

"Fools step in where angels fear to tread," Miss Hildenborough retorted triumphantly. "You'd better own up I'm right, Mrs. Pilbeam. That's *him*."

"I suppose so," the Argus-Eyed conceded aloud. To herself she said: "At last, thank God! It was time."

5

"I'm afraid I'm dreaming," said Melton, dropping Ella's arm when they were safe in her sitting-room, and standing off to look at her.

"It is the realisation of a dream to me," she said.

They stood face to face, their eyes on a level, a handsome pair, admiring each other. It might have been assumed that they were of the same caste; the type in detail was so similar. Their small dark-haired heads, their features refined to perfection, their clear delicate skins, the clean symmetry of the race-horse breed in their limbs, were so much of a type as almost to suggest a likeness; but the girl was incomparably the nobler specimen—the abler, the more alive of the two. Her vitality was inexhaustible; his at the best was fitful. Even as they stood the difference showed. There was suspended energy in Ella's attitude; in his, only languid ease.

"Then you did dream of me, my beautiful!" he exclaimed, drawing her to a seat beside him. "Oh! but it's good to be here at last!"

Ella was reminded of a grievance, his delay in coming. "You have been at home some time," she said.

He detected reproach in her tone. "I have—a cycle—a cycle of despair and pain."

This was good to hear. She looked at him inquiringly.

"I was told—given to understand"—he could not particularise because it was his mother who had given him to understand—"that you were engaged to Adnam Pratt."

"But how ridiculous! Who could suppose it? Someone must have intended to deceive you, but with what object?"

"The very question Adnam himself asked, only this morning. It was only this morning that I discovered the mistake——"

"The deception," Ella corrected him.

He silently accepted the correction. His mother's object was evident enough. The Little Lady would not lie, but she had certainly "given him to understand." It was an extreme length for her to go just to keep them apart, for she knew nothing, and could only have acted on the fear that he might be attracted. Evidently she would oppose their marriage with obstinate determination. It would be a *mésalliance* in a sense, of course, but his father, if he were consistent, must be on his side. His father had dinned it into him incessantly that the first consideration in his choice of a wife should be health, beauty, and intelligence; that the only well-born were those who were born to this inheritance. And where could one be found who so perfectly fulfilled these conditions as Ella?—if his father were consistent. But of course his father would be consistent in this. It was his favourite hobby.

Ignoring Ella's correction, Melton continued: "You see I have lost no time. I flew to you the moment I knew that you were free. I was returning from an early ride this morning when I met Adnam and made the discovery. You can't think what it meant to me! My elation! I galloped home—changed —drove full tilt into Closeminster—no train for hours, and then a slow one. I raised Cain. I said I'd have a special, or somebody's life in five minutes. I got the special. You should have seen the buzz in the station. Nobody felt safe, I'm sure, till they got me off. I thrashed inanimate objects till I beat my stick to pieces in my impatience while I waited. And if you'd seen me alone in the carriage all the way to town! I shouted! I sang! I ramped about! It was Ella! Ella! Ella! all the time. Now, say I am not an ardent lover if you dare! That cursed misunderstanding——"

"Treachery," she revised implacably.

"Never mind now, my own. Don't let's be vengeful. The past is wiped out. Only the present matters——"

"For the present," she cautioned him.

"We'll look out for the future on guard," he cried, jubilant in the overflow of his spirits. He sat silent for a little, his arm round her, one of her hands held to his lips, then he burst out again: "Do you remember how I rode past every day just to catch a glimpse of your little dark head framed in the window, and your profile?—Why did you never look up? You must have known I was hungering for a smile."

"I saw you come and I saw you go. Your coming and your going were the rising and setting sun of my day."

He thought this beautifully said, and clasped her close.

"So Society accepted you as a wonder," he began again. "It will have to receive you next as a wife. How will all the young men you have refused take it?"

"How do you know so much about me?" she asked.

"From Ann. Ann chattered, bless her, when we were alone together. I've never stayed in town since my return, for fear of seeing you. I don't mind how much men admire you. No one kisses you but me."

"Why not?" she asked demurely, and waited for the effect, then added—"paternally."

"Oh, you rogue! . . . I say, Ella, I'm going to stay the whole evening."

"No, not this evening. I'm expecting the Duke."

"My father? Does he come to see you?"

"He's been an angel of goodness to me."

"Just like him. He's an awfully good sort, my father. But why shouldn't I stay?"

"He has no idea—it would be awkward," she stammered.

"He must be told."

"But not abruptly. Think of the shock—a low-born peasant girl and his eldest son!"

"But you're splendidly born—a high-born favourite of nature, richly endowed in all that is essential to human happiness. It is just the kind of marriage he has always advocated for me. Time after time he has entreated me to bring good new blood into the family, to save it from decadence."

"Theory," she said.

The young man reflected. "Perhaps you are right," he said at last. "It would be abrupt—not the moment."

"I know I am right."

"You wish me to go now?"

"If you please."

"I don't please, but I suppose I must."

6

He was back next morning before London was well awake, but found her ready for him. The world was to be shut out that

day, such were her orders, and Miss Hildenborough and Mrs. Pilbeam must have a holiday. They smiled undisguised intelligence.

"May we congratulate you from the bottom of our hearts, Miss Banks?" Miss Hildenborough ventured.

"Oh, not yet!" Ella explained. "Not a word must be said to a soul at present."

"Not one word shall pass our lips, not was it ever so," said the Argus-Eyed.

Beveridge was looking on. There could be no concealment from these three.

"Beveridge, you know the gentleman I am expecting to-day?" Ella said to him, when the other two had gone.

"The young Markis, my lady," Beveridge answered, with a troubled face.

"He may come often. It is for me to report his visits, to anyone who should be told."

"You take it on yourself, my lady?" Beveridge asked doubtfully.

"I choose to report his visits myself to his Grace and Mr. Bosc. You must let me speak first, that is all. You can trust me, Beveridge?"

She could trust him not to be able to resist an appeal.

"I shall not be seeing them," he said, "till you've had your say, my lady."

She was satisfied with this undertaking. "It will be for the best," she assured him. She was assuring herself at the same time, for at the back of her mind there was a doubt.

Melton was less boyishly glad when he returned to her. He was radiant as before, but with more self-restraint. They walked up and down the showroom together arm-in-arm. After the long separation there was so much to be said. This was the first real talk they had ever had together. Romeo and Juliet in similar circumstances were about as well acquainted.

"The Duke did not come last night," Ella said. "Is he in town?"

"He is. So he broke his engagement! How wrong of him! And I was turned out for nothing."

"There was no engagement," she answered. "I expect him when he has not been for some little time. He will probably come this evening."

"Which means that I go out. I see!" he exclaimed with melodramatic emphasis. "I see! I have a rival in papa!"

She burst out happily:

"The dearest friend to me, the kindest man,
The best condition'd and unwearied spirit
In doing courtesies!

If I could tell you all I owe him! The Brastaby business alone——"

"Brastaby business?" he echoed. "Jaspar? The poor fellow who shot himself by accident?"

She felt it right to tell him the truth. "He trapped me into his flat one night," she blurted out, "sent me a note signed 'J. Brastaby,' which he knew I should suppose his aunt had written——"

"The devil!" Melton ejaculated.

"He locked the door. He would not let me go. I had been out practising shooting with my revolver that afternoon. I found the note on my return. I was expecting Lady Janet to send for me, and it was late. In my haste—not to keep her waiting—I forgot to take my revolver off. I said if he touched me I would shoot him dead. He made as if to touch me. I shot him dead."

Melton was staggered. He was conventional in his whole outlook upon life. It was not falling from convention for a man of his breed to marry an exceptional woman of a lower class; but that anything out of the ordinary should have happened to the woman, even though she was in no way to blame, was a shock to his every prejudice. It was hateful to think she had done such a deed, yet what else was there for it? He was speechless.

Interpreting his silence rightly she exclaimed in great distress:

"I know what you are feeling! I know! I know!"

But convention has its good side. He had to support her. "I am feeling for you," he said, pressing her hand to his lips and holding it there.

"I did not mean to kill him, but I had to defend myself," she pleaded.

"Of course you had to defend yourself," he answered mechanically; but she had killed a man, and he loathed to think it.

Again she read his thoughts correctly, and was deeply hurt. "Let me tell you exactly what happened," she said, drawing away from him. If he did not exonerate her fully she would none of him; she made that evident, and the fear of losing her helped the story as she told it, coherently and eloquently. As he listened hatred of the man and compassion for her mastered every other feeling.

"Certainly, you did right," he said. "I see that there was nothing else for it. I am thankful you had your revolver. But now let us forget all about it——"

"But the inquest. I have not told you——"

"Oh, yes, the inquest. My father——"

"And Mr. Strangworth and Col Drindon—they held me justified, but they did not think the law would——"

"I see. I read the report. But what happened to you?"

"I was dreadfully upset. I wanted to go away and be alone, and the Duke was for getting me out of danger. He sent me off in his yacht. That saved me—in myself." She recovered herself again at the recollection. "Oh, the sunshine!" she burst out. "And the warmth, and the blue, blue sky, and the blue, blue breaking waves, white-crested, and the sea-wind, and the silence all about, and the freedom! It was life at last, purified. All this"—she indicated her surroundings—"crumbled to dust and ashes, a dust heap of baleful impressions. I feared nothing. I wanted nothing. It did not matter whether you returned or not."

"Then it had mattered!" That could not be too often repeated.

"It had mattered—poignantly. But it was then—there in the silence, that I became sure of you. I had no doubt after that. I knew you would come."

Lover's raptures approved the climax. Then they sat down, his arm around her, her head on his shoulder, and talk filled in a lucid interval.

"I am glad, now that it is over, that I had that time abroad," he said. "I should not have gone if you had not so positively expressed your determination, that last time we met, never to speak to me again. But I already knew what it was to be avoided. You had given me a taste of that form of torment, you know. I couldn't have stood it again—the hanging about from morning till night trying to catch a glimpse of you. You dismissed me for being indefinite. I know it was that, and I am

glad now you did. My wishes were never indefinite, but I had no plan of campaign. I wanted to marry you, but I did not want to make trouble between my father and mother. There never had been any trouble between them, never a serious difference, and I could not bear to be the one to cause a rupture. I thought then, I think now, that my father would consent; but if he did, my mother would never forgive him, and all the beauty of their married lives would be spoilt. I saw no way out of it then——"

"But do you now?" she said.

"Yes. But I never should have if you had not sent me away. I'm a bit of a drifter. If I had been able to see you I should have contented myself for the time being; but when you cut me adrift——!" he made a despairing gesture. "And I had to go away to learn how impossible it was to live without you. That sharpened my wits. I've seen a lot of beautiful women since I saw you last, women other men raved about, and always, when they raved, I found myself thinking, 'But they haven't seen Ella!' And always when I saw their beauties myself I thought, 'If Ella were here no one would look at them!' There's none to compare to you, Ella, my own, not one."

Raptures.

"So it came to me—It's so simple, too. That is why I overlooked it perhaps for so long. This is what we must do. We'll consult no one. We'll just go and get married, and let them make the best of it."

Ella was silent. Now that marriage had become an imminent possibility she shrank; she was for putting it off.

"What do you say, my own? When shall it be?"

"We must wait," she rejoined breathlessly.

"But why?"

"The Duke—such ingratitude."

"He'll be all right," Melton was sure. "I expect he'll thank us for not getting him into a row with mamma. I know what will happen. Tears, sympathy, comforting caresses, these degenerate days, the undutifulness of children——"

"That horrid girl," Ella put in——

"'But I needn't tell *you* what power a woman has over a man. Poor Ninian! Nice fellow. No better son. Tempted, no doubt. Mustn't be hard on him. And, dearest, it might have been worse. It might have been someone disreputable. And she really is rather a remarkable girl. Exceptional. If it

doesn't turn out well it will be our fault.' 'Oh, do you think so?' 'Why, of course! If we countenance them, she'll take her place. It depends upon you, my dearest. You could mould her if you would. For myself, grieved as I am, I should prefer to let bygones be bygones. Live together happily ever after, eh? Like a fairy tale. King Cophetua and the beggar maid. In robe and crown the king stepped down, and his lady mother boxed his ears, but afterwards she forgave him.'"

"How absurd you are," Ella cried, putting her hand on his mouth to stop him.

"So the mater will say, and then there'll be smiles as well as tears, and the Marchioness of Melton will be presented on her marriage by the Duchess of Castlefield Saye."

"Oh, I don't want to," Ella broke out.

"Don't want what?" he asked in a ruffled tone. "Don't want to marry me? Or don't want to go to Court? Marry me you must, but you can please yourself about going to Court."

"I don't want to talk about either now," Ella replied, happily inspired. "Don't let us live in the future this morning, this is such a lovely present."

He agreed to that, and was won away to another subject.

Later he said: "Let's go over the house. I've not been here since Aunt Ally died. I'm glad you've not spoilt the ballroom. Those rugs and seats are appropriate, and the cabinets in the crevices look all right. It was here I danced at my first grown-up ball, and didn't I suffer agonies of discomfort and shyness! The mothers smothered me with attentions, but the girls were all laughing at me, I was sure."

In the small drawing-room he stood long before the portrait of his aunt. "She was awfully good to me," he said in a subdued tone. "I had the run of the house as a boy—my father and I. We used to be here together. I don't remember my mother here ever. Aunt Ally was an awfully good sort. Always doing something for somebody. I didn't notice, of course, as a little chap, but things come back to me, and I've been told since, or gathered from casual remarks—she was fond of young girls. To start them in life, that was her specialty. She would have loved you, Ella."

"I've thought sometimes——" Ella was beginning, but broke off, and added smilingly: "She won't speak to me now."

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked, puzzled.

"I should have called her portrait a speaking likeness when

I first came here," she said, evading a direct reply. "Now, it does not speak to me."

"That is the mistake of having pictures always on view," he said. "They lose their effect. The Japanese only show one or two at a time, and change them often. My father is laughed at for keeping the great Gainsborough at Castlefield Saye covered up, but he's quite right."

"What is the subject of the great Gainsborough?" she asked.

"I'm blessed if I remember," he answered carelessly. "I don't remember ever seeing it to notice it. It hangs in his own particular sanctum at the Castle, where the family never intrudes. I associate it—the sanctum, not the picture—with wiggings. I don't believe I've ever been in it except when he had me up to give me a talking to, and on those occasions pictures didn't interest me."

"I can't think what you could have done to deserve 'a talking to,'" Ella said.

"It was what I had not done as a rule," he answered. "I'm afraid I am a bit of a slacker."

Ella asked herself if "a bit of a slacker" wouldn't be best for a husband, a man who would let her go her own way without troubling to interfere, but she said nothing.

On the next floor he made for her bedroom, and walked in unceremoniously. "This used to be Aunt Ally's room," he said. "Yours now, I see."

Ella was shy of this intimate inspection, but unable to prevent it. "How do you see?" she asked, affecting indifference.

"It is more like you now than her, more alive in colour. She inclined to drab. What is the picture in the corner? May I look at it?"

He drew the drapery aside. The lovely, serious eyes looked into his. "Oh, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "I remember that girl—half remember her."

He stepped back the better to see the picture, and stood frowning, in an effort to capture elusive memories.

Ella held her breath, fearful of disturbing the effort, eager for information.

"She used to be here," he said at last. "She must have been one of the girls Aunt Ally took up and protected. They could not have been girls in our set, otherwise I should have met them again. They used to be here, and then they were not here, and that was all I ever knew about them. But I remember this

one particularly because she got me laughed at once; not intentionally; but a boy doesn't easily get over being laughed at. It rankles. She asked me why I stared at her so hard. I thought she was little Snowdrop out of the fairy tale, and I was watching for pearls and diamonds to fall from her lips. Their laughter galled me when they understood. But I must have had some appreciation of her beauty even as a little chap. How do you come to have her here?"

"For her beauty," Ella answered. She was disappointed that he could tell her no more.

"So you keep that picture covered up on my father's principle," he said.

"If it is his principle," she replied. "At all events, I like to come to it fresh—with a fresh eye."

They played about the house like happy children for some time, he pouring out reminiscences in which she delighted. But at last he had to go. He said good-bye, and was gone, but he got no further than the hall.

"I must— —" he began, returning hat in hand.

"You threaten me, sir!" she cried dramatically. "Go!" and she pointed to the door.

He put his arm round her.

"Villain, unhand me!" she exclaimed, pushing him away with what fury she could for laughing.

He muttered the appropriate stage direction: *"The dark villain goes off defeated;"* drew his hat down over his eyes, threw the corner of an imaginary cloak over his left shoulder, grasped an imaginary dagger, scowled at her, and strode off through one door, but reappeared immediately at the other, as the gallant high-minded young hero come to defend her, or to die in the attempt.

A happy smile lingered on Ella's face long after he had gone for good.

7

That night the Duke came. He found her radiant, talkative, a little excited at first, but that he attributed to the pleasure of seeing him again after an unusually long interval, and she soon recovered her habitual composure. It was clear to her that to marry Melton without the Duke's sanction would be an act of treachery, and she had definitely decided not to entertain the

proposal should Melton make it again. She had intended to tell the Duke herself that Melton had been to see her, to prepare him, even to make him suspicious; but not a word could she utter on the subject. An approach to it, merely in her own mind, set her heart beating to suffocation. And there was no real need to spoil this evening. What was the hurry? It would not do to be precipitate. She and Melton had not come to a clear understanding. They must talk the matter over more thoroughly before anything could properly be said to the Duke —by her, at least.

The fluttering of her heart subsided upon this decision. She felt like one who has barely escaped from a threatened disaster, and in her relief—perhaps also because there was latent in her an involuntary desire to make amends, as for a wrong done—she laid herself out to please the Duke as never before. But it is easy for the beloved one to give pleasure; she has only to smile.

He settled himself in his favourite chair, and called her to sit beside him. She sat on the floor at his feet looking up into his face, her head resting against his knee. Each longed that evening to come close in confidence to the other, a longing which drew them together outwardly; but inwardly each had something in mind which tended to create a barrier between them. On Ella's part this was the effect of her determination to say nothing on the subject which she felt to be most important; on the Duke's it arose from the suppression of an importunate desire to tell her what she was to him, a chronic desire only held in check by uncertainty as to the consequence.

While they pursued their separate trains of thought talk languished, but in the pleasure of being together they were unaware of the length of their silences. Ella was accustomed to respect his fits of absent-mindedness. He had much to occupy him, and it pleased her that he could think out his own problems in her company undisturbed. She was ready to talk if he chose, or to be silent when silence suited him best. She always waited on his mood, and thus they had arrived at the perfection of companionship. She was aware that he was troubling about something to-night, aware, too, that it cost him an effort to put aside the subject of his preoccupation. Some public matter, she supposed, or private one with which she had no concern—a matter evidently that he did not intend to discuss with her; for when at last he spoke it was to remark on the time, after a

glance at the clock. He had no idea it was so late: "Our last evening together for awhile," he said, laying his hand on her head. "I am going into the country to-morrow."

Had a question been admissible she would fain have asked him where he was going, and for how long. Instead she observed, diplomatically, hoping to draw him: "It must be lovely at Castlefield Saye, just now. I can follow you about there. When you are in some strange place, or I don't know where you are, it is as if I had lost touch with you."

"I shall be at Castlefield Saye," he answered. "But surely you never feel as if you had lost touch with me?"

Her eyes fell before the searching glance with which the words were accompanied, a tenderly sorrowful glance. She felt herself reproached for faithlessness.

"Only 'as if,'" she said. "I know, of course, that wherever you are, you are my best friend, but when you go, there is a blank that nobody else can fill."

A smile brightened the settled melancholy of his face for a moment. "Lonely sometimes, eh?" he inquired.

"You mustn't think that!" she exclaimed earnestly. "Think of all the interesting people I see!"

But it is the heart that suffers from loneliness, not the head, and nobody knew better than the Duke how seldom satisfaction for the heart comes of casual rencontres, even with the most interesting people.

"Surely I have everything that heart can desire?" she added, as if she had read his thoughts.

The essentially purposeful are not troubled with morbid self-consciousness; their interests are outside themselves. But it is possible to be self-sufficient in practical matters without being self-satisfied, and not to be self-satisfied argues recurrent discomfort. He had discovered no trace of self-satisfaction in Ella.

"Does that mean you are always happy in yourself," he asked, "heart and soul?"

"Now you are Mr. Strangworth," she accused him laughingly.

"Gregor? Good friend," he replied in jerks, his mind between each jerk silently finding reason for the audible expression. "Devoted. Wisest. Wish you'd promise to consult him in any difficulty. If I'm not at hand. No better adviser." A long pause, and then one of his audible asides: "Know he's right but can't bring myself——"

"But he's a mystic," she objected.

"So you distrust his worldly wisdom, eh? A mistake," he assured her. "Mysticism is an extension of worldly wisdom. Contemplative piety joined to active benevolence. There you are. Definition of a mystic."

"I did not know you leaned to mysticism," she said.

"As to leaning——" He shrugged his shoulders. "'The Call,' as they have it, hasn't come to me. When it does—if it does—come, I should wish to join that group." He paused to collect his thoughts, and then spoke consecutively, as he could when he took the trouble. "There is an awakening. Spiritual. A movement to counter the license and corruption everywhere so rife, is making itself felt. In politics, commerce, literature, art. Even in Society. The prime movers are not bound together by dogmatic agreement. They are bound together by the attraction of a common object. They draw their souls' sustenance from various sources according to their individual necessities, but they are one in spirit. And liberal-minded. Mystics of necessity. Because only true mystics have risen above the collective mind of the sect to which they belong. They shake hands on a higher plane. They are no more divided by their adherence to different denominations than friends are divided by the different houses in which they live. They may even meet and be happy in each other's houses without deserting their own. The house is a roof to cover them, a shelter from the world. They rejoice with one who has found a house to suit him. No one house would suit them all, but they are tolerant of another's requirements, and sympathetically glad of his content. There is only one kind of spiritual food, but there are many ways of cooking and serving it, and each is right in its way for the soul that is nourished by it. For the highest spiritual needs the food provided requires neither cooking nor serving. The spiritual food of the mystics comes to them a ripe fruit, and they share it with each other. You find individuals of every sect nowadays—Roman Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, Dissenter, Quaker—working together harmoniously in the common cause. Princess Anna, poor Col's George Bowden. An impossible combination one would think. So Gregor explains it."

"And you don't choose to be one of them," she ventured.

"There is no choosing," he answered, suppressing a sigh. "The worthy are chosen and called. The rest—if they hang

on to the outer fringe of the movement. Desiring to be called in——"

"I do not understand the desire," she said.

"You do not suffer from the great want of the age," he suggested.

"What is the great want of the age?"

"Comfort," he answered laconically.

"Consolation?" she questioned.

"A better word perhaps. There is superabundance of cleverness. Self-conscious. Cleverness entertains, but there is no comfort in it. Clever books. They distract at the moment, stimulate the mind, but there is no comfort in them, nothing uplifting. The heart goes empty away. Put the book down, and heaviness of heart, forgotten in the reading, is back again heavier than ever. Test the output of high standards of life, and you find depravity ingeniously arguing its point, extenuating turpitude, speciously masking self-indulgence by exalting animal proclivities, showing necessity when there is need for self-restraint. To call black white does not alter the depressing effect of black in the conduct of life. The mind may be influenced, but the subconscious self of a man, which knows, is not to be persuaded by a well-turned phrase. Hence the discomfort. We are at civil war with ourselves. The tendency of modern cleverness is to set the finite mind with its fleshly lusts against the infinite spirit and its aspirations. Darkness against light.

"The lists are set from of old
And the warfare endureth forever."

"If it is to endure forever, why trouble ourselves?" said Ella, sitting off from him.

He rose and stood with his back to the fireplace, looking down at her without seeing her. "'Moral principles rule the world, but at short distances the senses are despotic,'" he pursued. "A plea for forgiveness, our excuse. But despotism is to be resisted. A man may be overcome once, taken unawares. He can arm himself against a second attack. It may be that the warfare is necessary to strengthen the moral fibre of the individual."

"How do you make out that moral principles rule in a world so full of injustice?" Ella, deprecating, claimed his attention.

"They rule by general acceptance," he answered. "Other

factors come in to modify the application. Particularly confusion of mind. Only the greatest in all ages make no mistake; their acceptance of moral principles is whole-hearted; but even they only do what they can, they cannot do what they would. Theoretically the distinction between right and wrong is clear. Collectively mankind acknowledge the difference. Individuals, for the most part, even criminals have a sense of it. Men do wrong, but it is the exception for one to call wrong right. Anything like a concerted attack to make wrong out to be right is a new thing in history. It is being made. And there is no mistaking the issue. The triumph of moral principles means the triumph of civilisation; their defeat, a reeling back into the beast."

"And with all this going on in the world, this battle to be fought, we are also required to worry about the world to come, heaven and that sort of thing!" she exclaimed.

"Great teachers are attempting to make us realise that our work in the world is continuous," he said.

"Reincarnation? Does the idea appeal to you?"

"My attitude towards it won't alter the law, if it be a law of our being," he replied, smiling down on her. "People seem to think that an expression of their wishes on the subject of a future life settles the question. Which shows belief to be very much a question of feeling. Likes and dislikes. Confusion of mind comes out strong in religious discussions. Heard a man the other day argue that it was a come-down for an emperor to reincarnate as a curate. Missed the whole point. The ascent is spiritual. A curate might well be on a higher plane than an emperor."

The charm of her face upturned to his as she sat there on the floor, diverted his thoughts, but she recalled them.

"One side of me goes all the way with you," she said. "The other—no, the other doesn't. If you agree with Mr. Strangworth. Breasting the storms of life with the help of the spirit in us is a phrase that only appeals to me so long as I think of the spirit as a possession of my own. Mr. Strangworth says that is pride of intellect. But I believe that we have a better world in ourselves, within reach, so long as we are capable of high thoughts."

"High thoughts help us over the border," he said. "The test of the beauty of a thought. Does your heart expand to it? The value of an idea or sentiment is best tested by the

heart; the heart expands to a thought that is great and good. Think nobly and your spirits rise. Brings us back to my starting-point. The absence of comfort in our modes of thought. More apt to contract the heart than to expand it. Commercialism. Material issues. Personal profit at the expense of others. Self-seeking. Self-interest hypocritically guised to look like altruism. Self-indulgence preaching what it pretends are larger views of life. Wrong-headed, wrong-hearted. Self-restraint argues backbone; strengthens it too. Unstable as water does not prevail. But there you are! Where can you find high thought in such a bag of tricks?"

She was looking up at him thoughtfully. "What is it, eh?" he asked.

"I was thinking that what you have been saying—things like that said in another tone—would sound bitter."

"Bitter, eh? Bitter. Possibly. Hope I'm not bitter. Don't feel so. Saddened."

"The things that sadden you make me rage," she said meditatively. "I want to avenge—to avenge beauty on the perpetration of every ugliness in thought or word or deed."

"Vengeance itself is ugly," he rejoined.

"I see it as magnificent," she said. "It must be in my blood. At all events it was early instilled into my mind. My grandmother thirsted for vengeance on the authors of our suffering——"

"Your suffering?"

"The sufferings of the poor."

"Wrong-headed, wrong-hearted," he repeated. "Vengeance is destructive. It is reconstruction of life on an altruistic basis that we should be aiming at. Love. What does Gregor say? Love finds a way. Only love is beautiful. The passions destroy—anger, hate, revenge, lust, which calls itself love——" He broke off, and asked abruptly: "Couldn't you forgive a wrong? Could you forgive me—something—you held to be very wrong?"

The notion of his being guilty of anything very wrong amused her. She smiled up at him affectionately.

"It would all depend on the kind of very wrong thing," she replied.

"Suppose it was something that turned out to be for your benefit?"

"Would somebody else be wronged?" she asked.

"In a way. Several people, though they would never know it. Never suffer. And one who consented to be wronged—gladly."

She bent her brows on this puzzle.

"You must understand that I should be very much to blame, but no one else," he added.

"A dishonourable thing?" she asked.

He hesitated. "Some people think so. Posterity is complacent enough on the subject. It admits a great excuse."

"I think I should always blame anything that could be called dishonourable," she replied upon consideration. "I don't know. I could hate the sin and love the sinner perhaps in some cases, but in your case the fall in my estimation would be from such a height that there would be nothing left of the sinner for me either to love or hate."

"So I feared," he muttered, but she paid no attention to the words though she heard them. An old question had suddenly recurred to her. Why was it that she had so much more to say to the Duke than to Melton, so much more in common with him? He pushed Melton aside out of her mind as it were. She had not thought of him again until now since they began to talk, and now it was really of the Duke that she was thinking.

But she began to feel cramped and made a move to rise. He held out his hand to help her. Her feet were asleep. He had to support her to a chair. Her laughing exclamations and his concern for the poor feet asleep changed the direction of their thoughts.

"Ow! Needles and pins!" she exclaimed, wriggling her feet so that her shoes fell off.

He picked them up mechanically with the instinctive protective movement of a gentleman to wait on a woman, but forgot his purpose, and, lost in thought, put a shoe on each hand, and slowly walked up and down the room, using one shoe at intervals as a brush to polish the other. Ella, accustomed to his absent-minded vagaries, patiently waited for her shoes, until he should come to himself again.

He became aware of her at last as an object beautiful to contemplate, and stood looking at her.

"Nice dress," he finally decided.

It was satin of a pale rose tint, trimmed with lace that an Empress might have worn on a wedding gown. "As a costume

it seems to me incomplete without shoes," she delicately hinted.

"Shoes, eh?" He looked at one shoe and then at the other. "Of course! Needles and pins! Here, hold out a foot."

He bent to put the shoes on for her, but she took them from him gently.

"Am I not worthy?" he asked with his melancholy smile.

"There must have been some limit to King Cophetua's attentions to the beggar maid," she answered.

"Beggar maid?" the Duke questioned, and took his stand with his back to the hearth, his mind intent on a new train of thought.

After she had spoken Ella remembered Melton's allusion to the beggar maid, and other scraps of their talk, mingling with the Duke's, floated vaguely into her mind. She glanced round the softly-lighted, spacious room, in which there reigned a happy combination of her own feeling for broad effects with the Duke's refined sense of artistic values. The resulting harmony satisfied. It was a room in which mind and body could both be at ease without asking why or wherefore. The age might lack comfort, but her mind halted a moment on the thought that it was incongruous to feel the lack here, where the acme of comfort was achieved. Then she renewed her acquaintance with a picture that she had not noticed for some time, and was reminded of what Melton had said about losing sight of pictures that were always on view.

"What are you thinking about?" the Duke asked abruptly.

Startled by the suddenness of the question she answered abruptly: "Your curtained picture."

"How do you know I have a curtained picture?" he asked, so sharply that she looked up at him in surprise. He was looking hard at her.

"I have taken a liberty," she exclaimed. "Excuse me."

"I wish to know," he said authoritatively.

Then she remembered the first she had heard of the picture, the gossip in the showroom. She told him the story about the inquisitive old Duchess of Dollars having gone to Castlefield Saye on purpose to discover "the secret." "The subject," Ella corrected herself.

"Secret!" he ejaculated contemptuously. "Meddling old woman!"

Ella, in silence, repented her indiscretion.

"You have a theory too, I suppose!"

His tone put Ella on her mettle. "I am not a meddling old woman," she said haughtily.

The Duke was pleased with this display of spirit. His countenance relaxed. He considered her admiringly for a little. "Daughter of Eve! You want to know all about it," he at last accused her, smiling.

"I do know all about it," she answered, "all that I care to know. You cover it up that you may see it with a fresh eye when you want to look at it. I do the same myself with one picture I have—one I love."

He was arrested by this, but he covered up his thought with an irrelevant remark. "You are a queer girl, Ella," he said.

"Be pleased, your Grace, to excuse my queerness," she smiled up at him.

"Do you remember that first time I went to see you," he said, his good-humour restored, "how you lectured me about Women's Rights?"

"Lectured you? Oh, surely not!" she remonstrated. "But I was an echo of Mrs. Pratt in those days. I am a long way from that time now."

"Indeed! Don't you believe in women any more?"

"I know women so much better now," she said, excusing a failure of faith.

"Good material in women," he reflected, "but very poorly worked up into shape at present. Efforts being made——" He broke off, and asked a question as his abrupt habit was: "What's your prime objection to women?"

"Their feelings." The answer was so much in his own vein that she might have been mimicking him, but mannerisms are catching. "You think you've pinned them down to a point, and the next minute they're off on a side-issue; the side-issue then becomes the point. Why? A gust of feeling!"

"Women, eh? Big proposition (American expression)," he said reflectively. "No generalising on the subject of women. The truth about one coterie slanders another, and slanders individuals in both coteries. There are tendencies, but there is nothing permanent in a tendency. Swing of the pendulum. Common mistake to set down a tendency as a radical defect or quality. Made that mistake myself. You find women nowadays exposing themselves to the world pathologically, as only the doctor hitherto has been allowed to see them, in secrecy and seclusion. Exposing their own defects. Can't tell men any-

thing they are ignorant of on that subject. Men in decency and delicacy have preferred to veil the ugliness of women. Men's reticence a tribute of respect to women. A shock to decent-minded men to find women with less respect for themselves. My first false conclusion was that women are fundamentally coarser than men; don't sense ugliness so finely. A mistake. Found on looking into it that it was only one of your flamboyant personalities here and there calling for the limelight; fond of disporting herself in it at any cost of exposure. Nothing concentrates the limelight of public attention on an individual nowadays so instantly as an outrageous utterance. Utterances good or bad count for little in themselves. The public eye is not discriminating; anyone it sees clearly becomes an object of interest, and an object of interest is always in itself a pleasant distraction. A pleasant distraction merits applause. So she arrives."

"Women are a big proposition as you say," said Ella, tired of the subject.

"But don't forget, men can be pretty mean, too," he encouraged her. "It's six of one and half a dozen of the other, my dearest."

"I expected so much more of women," she mourned.

"The mistake is to expect anything of anybody," he rejoined. "Expect nothing and you'll not be disappointed doesn't preclude hope. Hope for the best."

A silent interval followed during which each hoped for what seemed good to them, she with her eyes on the floor thinking of Melton, he with his eyes on her.

He looked round the room at last, preparing to go. "How many happy talks we have had here," he said. "If a record had been kept of the subjects, what a variety!"

"Education for me," she answered, rising.

"And for me," he declared. "Glad to have had this last happy talk."

"Oh, don't say 'last'!" she exclaimed. "It sounds ominous."

"Superstitious, eh? Surprising in you! Yet perhaps not. There's a revival in the air. Confess, though, that I thought superstition had had its day. When it had its uses. When it answered the purpose of the policeman-bogey nurses threaten the children with, to make them good."

"Almost my grandmother's words with regard to the church and hell-fire," Ella answered. "She said the rich supported

the church in order to terrorise the poor with the threat of hell-fire as a punishment for disobedience, if they attempted to resist oppression."

"Your grandmother, eh?" He looked at her thoughtfully. "Your grandmother was the master-light of all your seeing?"

She considered this. "I suppose so," she said at last. "She was a wise woman. The more I know of the world, the more confidently I pin my faith to her teaching."

"Damn——" he exploded, but checked himself. "Excuse me. What was I going to say? Oh, my son"—Ella's heart bounded—"Eustace. He and Lena are coming to town. Lena Kedlock that was, his wife, you know. You'll be glad to see her? Can't help liking her, but what a puss!" He drew her to him. "Is there anything I can do for you, my dearest?" he asked, kissing her tenderly. "Anything you want that I can give you?"

"Give me my heart's desire," she answered, returning his kiss.

"Is it mine too, I wonder? But anyway—— If I can give you your heart's desire, I will. I promise you."

As a rule his leave-takings were abrupt, but that night he lingered, and she, too, parted from him with unusual reluctance. No sooner had they separated than he found himself sore with dissatisfaction, and so did she. He had half a mind to return and take her into his confidence, but he feared, he feared—— And she had half a mind to call him back and take him into her confidence, but the habit of abiding by a decision once arrived at, restrained her. "Alas, we know not what we do when we speak words!" said Shelley. Has any poet celebrated the sorrows that come of the words which are not spoken but should have been? Least said may be soonest mended, but nothing said may have fatal consequences when honesty would have been the best policy. There is always a right card to be played, but the difficulty is to know which it is. The inner voice is the only reliable guide, and those who refuse its counsel make life a gamble for themselves.

CHAPTER VIII

THE UNDERTOW IN THE LANDLOCKED BAY

1

THE dissatisfaction that had come upon Ella after her parting from the Duke passed off in sleep. She awoke next morning to the business of the day. There were her lacemakers to be thought of. Any slackness on her part meant a decline in the sale of their work. She knew better than to expect the crowd that came about her to buy for altruistic motives. Some personal advantage was the only argument that prevailed with them as a rule. The chance of a bargain was not to be missed, but the hope of adding to their own personal attractions was the thing that tempted her customers to launch out most extravagantly. As everything she wore looked well upon her, she had only to show herself in some novelty to make it the rage. Fashionable ladies whose stock-in-trade was their beauty, had flocked about her from the first, fawned upon her, flattered her, in order to wile from her the time to study her, for it was her habit to excuse herself from attending upon them when they could invent no business to detain her. There was a latent belief amongst them that she must have some recipe for beauty which could be extracted from her by cunning persuasion, or described by patient observation. That walk of hers about which men raved, the buoyant step on which she seemed to rise from the earth and float towards you,—where had she learnt the trick and how? And her complexion? Its transparency and the wild-rose tint which was all the colour that she ever showed,—surely she knew of some magic wash to produce the lovely effect? If Ella had confessed to the wash and supplied distilled water delicately perfumed at five guineas a bottle, she would have been put to it to meet the demand. And had she been capable of the fraud she would doubtless have better understood the women who besieged her; but as it was she saw nothing wrong with them but what she conceived to be their silliness.

While her own reputation stood high, it had protected her from the kind of gossip which would have revealed to her the undertone of corruption in the landlocked bay of Society to

which her tenure of the Corner House confined her. While the better element had predominated in the showroom the more raffish were restrained to pay her in hypocrisy "the sort of homage which vice pays to virtue," and had not talked freely before her; but lately, claiming her for kin, and given the opportunity by the change in herself which had brought her down from her proud isolation to mix with them freely in search of excitement, they had spoken out, and she began to hear gossip of a kind that would never have reached her but for the slander which had coupled her name with the Duke's, and shifted the balance of her clientèle.

The blighting materialism of the nineteenth century had set in by this time, killing the more exquisite cultures of the soul, and sowing a crop of weeds whose flowering is fatal to the diviner possibilities of the human race. License had begun to masquerade as progress. "Liberty to be oneself" was a popular catchword, which meant riddance of moral restraint, and acceptance of the bondage of vice. Individuals, clamouring for the right to lead their own life, were for satisfying their baser desires at no matter what cost of suffering to their immediate neighbour, or to the community at large. Sensuality, superstition, and greed were common, and treachery was rife to such an extent that none knew whom they might trust. The blight was international and worst in the educated classes—taking into account the numerous advantages and chances they had to escape it. Ella's friends had made the mistake of not putting her on her guard by enlightening her. Her unconsciousness had been beautiful to them as the innocence of a child, and they had sought to protect her as they would have protected a child. Until the Brastaby affair, vice, as she understood it, was of hideous appearance, a thing unmistakable, which she might catch a glimpse of in some degraded being as she drove through the streets; but that she should ever be in its company and not know it for what it was, she had supposed to be impossible. The Brastaby affair had shattered that illusion, but without making her suspicious of other pleasant men of her acquaintance. She took it that Brastaby had been an exception. Mr. Harkles and Filmer Dabbs, junior, had given her a shock of disgust, which she had got over by banishing the subject from her mind. That she herself had been the victim of evil gossip had never occurred to her.

With Melton's return had come the conclusion of one whole

period of her existence, and she was just now unconsciously marking time in preparation for the next. She had passed through the phase of childhood, with her grandmother; of girlhood at Red Rose Farm; of early womanhood at the Corner House; and now before her were marriage and maturity. And there was necessarily a difference in her whole outlook. The side of her which had been passive now became active. She began involuntarily to observe where she had hitherto been unseeing, but it was with her mind's eye only, her spiritual perception having lapsed.

Intellect, barren of the subtler power of the spirit, laboriously climbs upwards, mounting the foothills ridge beyond ridge, but never attains to the ultimate height where alone satisfaction is found. The thinker's mind, the alpenstock on which he depends, fails him always short of happiness. There is momentary elation in the successes of mortal mind, but no permanent happiness, and, missing happiness, the thinker misses the crown of achievement and suffers without profit. To reach the Goal Glorious he must have wings, and wings are of slow growth and painful. Suffering is inevitable, the common lot, and only profitable when it promotes the growth of wings. It is the privilege of the Elect of the Spirit to suffer to this end.

Ella was still in the stage of relying upon her alpenstock. She could see no farther than the ridge above her for which she was making, and she was satisfied that there was the ultimate summit and resting-place, whence she could accomplish the good that she designed. But she could not repose upon this certainty because the emotional side of her nature, hitherto for the most part dormant, disturbed the calm of her assurance. Thought without feeling is blind of an eye; emotion is the great enlightener. She was at the time of life when the young are in love with love—love narrowed down to a point; and she took it for granted that the man she had long ago chosen for her own was the source of the glow in her breast. On that subject she did not think. But the habit of thought in her case was inveterate, and her mind now became curiously inquiring where it had been indifferent. So far, with few exceptions, she had regarded the throng about her from the point of view of her business only. She was outside their social sphere, and considered them upon the whole merely as clients with whose characters and private lives she had no concern. But now that she was to be made one with them socially, they became important to her as human

beings whose existence must impinge upon her own, for good or for evil. Her need was to know the worst, and, as if in response to it, these people unconsciously exposed themselves for her information in casual words and comments upon each other.

She might have perceived all along that much that was said to her, or in her hearing, bore directly upon her own circumstances. There is never an end to such intimations if people would but watch for them and seize upon the messages that come to them for their guidance. Every crisis in life is led up to by signs which are not missed or wrongly interpreted when the spirit is broad awake. The mind may grasp the riddle of life as a question, it is writ large on the surface; but it is beneath the surface that the answer is to be found, at a depth to which mortal mind alone is powerless to penetrate. To Ella, now at the height of her mental activity, the surface was clear enough, but her spiritual numbness clouded the depths. She was aware of the confusion of life, of the battle which is to the strong but decides nothing, because the conquered of to-day arm again and become the conquerors of to-morrow; and she had armed for the fray on the right side, but with the same arm as her adversaries, the arm that is indeterminate.

But the higher powers had not abandoned her; the fight for her soul was still in progress. The old priest might suppose himself merely doing the anxious Argus-Eyed a kindness by making her lady's acquaintance; but unknowingly he came as part of the divine power against evil, an influence for good by reason of his saintliness. Such influences still came about her, friends of her imprisoned spirit, their thoughts opposed to the thoughts of the enemies of her soul, restraining if not utterly vanquishing their malignity. The silent inmost self of the good is untiring; it creates an atmosphere which is fatal to the opposite faction.

2

It was the opposite faction that predominated in the showroom that afternoon when Ella made her appearance. Lean-headed young men of poor physique propped up on alcohol, their faces clean-shaved, their tight, thin lips holding in their cynicism until opportunity offered to launch out effectively, approached her with exaggerated politeness ill-concealing their

disrespect. Their overweening conceit came out in a mixture of condescension and boastfulness whatever they were doing. They drank their whiskies and sodas with a boastful air, and patronisingly, as if they were conferring a favour on whisky and soda. They were automata to Ella. She could not take them seriously as human beings. She supposed that the women they dangled around only tolerated them by the way, as toys wound up for their amusement. They slung phrases at each other's heads with admirable facility. Mockery, "the fume of little minds," was the favourite exchange. None of them lived to make life pleasant for others; they gave only that they might get. Gamblers all, they staked for pleasure more or less recklessly, careless who lost so that they won. Charming manners they had at command to cloak their hardness and cruelty, but the hardness and cruelty were there and appeared on occasion. In such a set there could be nothing soul-sustaining,—an expression Ella would not have used herself, but she was susceptible to the influence and missed it by the loss of strength that ensued, as she would have missed, physically, a nourishing quality in her diet had it been secretly withdrawn.

This afternoon their cackle, which had been a distraction while she craved for excitement, irritated her, and she withdrew into herself. Outside the rain was pouring down in torrents, and the showroom was so dark that the candles had to be lighted. It was her "at home" day, and wet weather always increased the attendance, there being nothing to be done out of doors.

She was standing on the lower steps of the daïs, whence she could see the whole room and out into the hall beyond. It was an animated pageant she looked down upon, brightened by the dresses of fashionable women, who were just then wearing lively colours, and strange in the artificial light. Mr. Strangworth's string-band was playing *fortissimo* the conclusion of an arrangement of wild Hungarian dances, gay music which had captured attention. And over all flitted vague shadows from the candles flickering in stray gusts of wind.

When the music ceased the double doors of the room beyond the daïs were thrown open. It was tea-time and there was an immediate stampede. People pushed past Ella up the steps. One would have thought that they had had nothing to eat that day, there was such a scramble for tables. Two couples, who had been sitting apart, loitered into the hall, affecting no spe-

cial object. When the coast was clear they stole upstairs. Ella knew them—Lady Cruxhaven with Callowabbey, and Princess Taxidos with Mr. Harkles (how dare he come here again!). There was something stealthy in the proceeding that annoyed her. Evidently the Argus-Eyed was right; she should never have let such people have the run of the house.

She did not ask herself why she was thinking of them for the first time invidiously as "such people."

The showroom had thinned by this time. The O'Haleron hung about alone, waiting for someone, apparently. The hall door stood open, and presently Lady Ballard and Sarb came running up the steps as if late and in haste, but smiling confidently, the colour rich in her gipsy face. Glancing hither and thither she descried The O'Haleron, who, seeing her at the same time, went eagerly forward to meet her. With a covert smile and nod she turned and ran lightly upstairs. He followed her.

Stealth again. What was the meaning of it? Ella asked herself.

A voice answered the silent question quietly in two words: "An assignation."

Startled, she looked down from her perch into Monsignor Caffany's upraised face. He was standing on the floor with Lady Janet Brastaby.

Lady Janet had not been to the Corner House since the shooting affair, and only came now under strong compulsion. Her reason acquitted Ella, but her feelings did not, because she was sorry for Jaspar. She held it right for a woman to kill a man under the circumstances when there is nothing else for it, but in this case she was fain to believe that there had been other means of escape. It is easy to settle what ought to have been done under the circumstances that can be imagined minus the difficulty which made impossible any course of action but the one pursued. Lady Janet accused Ella of precipitation, of having blood on her hands which need not have been shed, a horror which she conceived must make Ella herself repulsive. She had come prepared to find her so, and had braved the meeting, not because Princess Anna required her to see about some lace she wanted—she could have got out of that by sending a deputy—but because her one hope of seeing Gregor Strangworth, whom she had met nowhere else of late, was at the Corner House. However occupied he might be with other things, she had a

jealous suspicion that he would make time to watch over Ella.

As she entered the showroom she had seen Monsignor Caffany in the distance, standing apart talking to Miss Hildenborough, and had joined him. They were old friends.

"I'll see you later about some lace I want," she said to Miss Hildenborough, curtly dismissing her. "The atmosphere of this place has changed since I was last here," she went on after a glance round; "it is poisonous to-day."

The high, narrow windows were open, and the air, filtering through black gauze, was as pure as London air could be.

The priest looked at her inquiringly. She was staring at Ella, who was conspicuous from where they stood, but unconscious of herself as an object of interest. "You mean the moral atmosphere. But nothing mephitic comes from that quarter," he said, indicating Ella.

Lady Janet was surprised to find that she agreed. In Ella's presence she felt none of the shrinking she had anticipated. On the contrary, she was drawn to her as strongly as ever. "You admire her?" she asked, curious to know his opinion.

"The first time I saw her, I thought, Holy Mother, what a lovely face!"

"But now? You miss something? Am I right?"

"It is a proud face," he said, his benign eyes upon Ella, considering her.

Lady Janet had her answer from his point of view. "And pride is of the devil," she expanded it.

"Pride is an instrument the devil makes use of," he replied.

"And you are here to foil him?" she ventured smilingly. "That could be done by blunting the instrument, by casting her down in the dust to humble her, a cruel expedient."

"I hardly know why I am here," he answered, not dreaming that presently he would himself have struck the first of the blows which were to "stab" her "spirit broad awake."

They had approached and were waiting beside her to catch her attention, so it happened that they also witnessed the little episode on the other side of the room, on which she was intent at the moment.

"An assignation!"

The old priest uttered the words involuntarily, and immediately apologised. "I am afraid I startled you," he said.

Ella's face lighted up with a welcome when she saw who it was. She stepped down at once to greet him, and in the act

missed the significance of his exclamation for the time being, but it came to her later.

They shook hands, Lady Janet with her accustomed cordiality.

"I saw you talking to Miss Hildenborough awhile ago," Ella said to his reverence. "I hoped you would not go without speaking to me."

"I should hardly do that," he answered with his benign smile. "I was on my way to pay my respects when Miss Hildenborough stopped me. Miss Hildenborough was apparently seized with an imperative desire to confide in me." His eyes twinkled humorously. "She stopped me to tell me the dream of her life."

"The dream of her life!" Ella exclaimed. "What can be the dream of Miss Hildenborough's life!"

"Are you so far from divining it?" he said regretfully.

Before she could reply a sudden racket arose. Doors banged, windows rattled, the candles flickered almost out, and monstrous shadows, leaping from nowhere, swept across the room, a ghostly battalion, gone as soon as sighted.

"How uncanny!" Lady Janet exclaimed with a shiver.

"A squall," said Ella prosaically, and, beckoning to Beveridge, she ordered him to close the windows, but not quite.

She returned to the question. "What is the dream of Miss Hildenborough's life?"

"She sees this beautiful room as a chapel dedicated to the love of God, the altar here"—he pointed to the daïs—"and there on the polished floor holy Religious kneeling in adoration."

Ella silently opposed the suggestion. Lady Janet's heart responded sympathetically. "The love of God——" she began, and hesitated.

In the pause, the babble of voices in the tea-room and the incessant sound of the rain without, pouring down in a deluge, grew importunate.

"Why to the love of God?" she asked.

"For Realisation," he replied, "by concentration, by meditation, by contemplation."

"For our comfort?"

"And for the comfort of God."

"The comfort of God!"

The beautiful ascetic old face of the priest grew "other worldly." "Is that so strange a thought?" he asked. "God

created a man to love Him and to companion His loneliness. Were it otherwise, would he ask for man's love? In love is the companionship of God and man, the bond of union. Without man's love God is loneliness itself; lonely as a king on a throne who has no place in the hearts of his subjects. When man fails his God in love they are separated. Man is lonely without God and God is lonely too. Each needs the comfort of the other's love. There is, indeed, only one comfort in life for man, that he should know his God and love Him. The chronic ache of loneliness in the human heart is the ache of God unloved."

His eyes appealed to Ella for her thought. She gave him a glance that looked like intelligent acquiescence. But she was in the chronic state of the critic who is the more dogmatic the less he understands.

"Miss Hildenborough is wonderful—so unexpected," she said, but she softened the sarcasm with her smile. Genuine smiles, which are rare, win a genuine response. Monsignor Caffany smiled, but he also sighed.

"I like the feeling in your churches," Lady Janet said, "the atmosphere of prayer. I can believe that where so many generations have knelt in faith imploring help and comfort, help and comfort are to be found."

"But not without purification," he answered. "Sin is the dirt of the spiritual world; it is constantly accumulating on us and about us, and must be constantly cleared away. You reject the cleansing process."

"Not altogether," she replied, "though it does not seem to have answered. The world is as wicked as it ever was—considering that it knows so much better. But it is not the forms of your religion that I object to. I should feel them a help; your sacraments especially, taken spiritually. It is the accretions that repel me; the accretions with which your Church has overlaid the Divine simplicity of the teaching of Christ."

"And do you feel repelled too?" he asked Ella.

"I cannot bear to go into your churches," she answered bluntly, "because of the horrible life-size crucifixes."

"But does not that pathetic figure, suffering to save us, appeal to your heart?—make you love God?"

"No. It makes me hate man."

"And turn from God?"

"The crucifixion is cruel," she shuddered. "Surely, both for

the sake of God and man it would be better not to perpetuate the memory of it. Looking at it you may love God, but you must hate man. . . . I shrink from your religion. It is all torment, torment of body and torment of mind. Give me the gods in a state of ineffable calm! The gods are strong!"

"Pagan," said Lady Janet.

"But when sorrow comes, the sorrow that robs beauty of its appeal, darkens the day, and silences the meaning of music, where will you turn for relief?" the priest asked Ella. "The ineffable calm of the gods is not disturbed by human suffering."

"Why should I suffer such sorrow?" Ella flashed back resentfully. "But, anyway, I think I shall have the sense to avoid anesthetics. The man or woman is a poor thing who cannot endure the troubles of life without an anesthetic."

"You call religion an anesthetic!" he said, tenderly reproachful. "I seem to see that you will have to suffer, and I pray that you may not harden your heart perversely. If our hearts are tender when God has need of us, He can mould them to His purposes; but the heart that is hard must be broken."

As at a signal, a strain of music abruptly switched their minds off this track,—strange exciting music, passing from single, soft, significant notes sung by the violins, to thundering chords, a long crescendo, swelling and lapsing, the haunting melody rhythmically marked as metre is marked in poetry.

It was short, and they listened to the last note, then Lady Janet asked what it was.

"Russian music," Ella answered, "but I never remember the name, because I have always thought of it as 'Col Drindon's Poem,' it so exactly expresses one that he read to me—ages ago."

"Music may do a great deal for words, but words can do nothing for music," Lady Janet remarked.

But Ella missed this *obiter dictum*. A wave of feeling had swept her back to the hour, "ages ago," when Col Drindon sat at her feet, there, on the steps of the daïs, reading her his "Lament of the Faded Flower"—swept her back with a pang. Never again, except in dreams, would he sit at her feet——

"I must go. I hope to see you soon again."

Her mind sprang back to attention. Monsignor Caffany was holding out his hand to her.

"Yes, soon again, I hope," she responded.

But, unknown to him as to her, his mission was accomplished, and it was many a long day before she saw that beautiful, old, ascetic face again.

3

People came flocking from the tea-room. Society, always acquisitive, and with its stomach full, had eyes for its outside adornment again, and circled about Ella. It was observed, anachronistically, that she looked like a young Greek goddess, though, if young Greek goddesses could have commanded geranium pink satin and lace for the purpose, they might have draped themselves very much as she was draped that day.

The old Duchess of Chisleham, commonly called Duchess of Dollars on account of her rapacity; upright, scraggy, bewigged, nose perpetually in air as if she were sniffing suspiciously at the lower animals of her species, raised her lorgnon and made no bones about examining Ella from all points of view. She saw herself in just such a costume, but not as Ella saw her, and she coveted that lace—at a reasonable price. In the interests of a bargain it was right to condescend to the lower animal. She greeted Lady Janet, but addressed Ella. "You keep this place fresh with the windows open," she said. "I compliment you on your good sense. There's nothing like fresh air for a tonic. I sleep with my windows wide open every night——"

"Every night, Duchess?" Lady Janet interposed. "To know when to shut the windows at night is the beginning of wisdom on that subject, I should have thought."

She was thinking of fog and snow and rain drifting in, of biting frost and bitter east wind.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed a girl whom the Duchess had in tow. "It was too awful for words what we suffered in the dormitories at school in bad weather, because we daren't shut the windows at night. I'd have a law passed to protect children from fresh air maniacs."

The Duchess censured them both with a haughty stare for their impertinence. She always spoke positively, as if it had been given her to have the last word on every subject, and was not accustomed to contradiction.

"That is rather nice lace you have on your dress," she said to Ella. "It would do for a quiet occasion"—"quiet occasion"

introduced to cheapen the lace—"Those garlands of flowers and medallions are quite nice. What is the price?"

The "rather nice lace" was a superb set of point *d'Argentan* made originally for a queen.

"This lace is mine," said Ella.

"I supposed so," the Duchess reproved her. "I asked the price."

"I do not sell my personal possessions," said Ella.

"Oh, I forgot," the Duchess sneered. "Costly personal possessions are a privilege of your present position."

She turned her back on the "Show Woman" and stalked away.

The girl lingered behind.

"What are you doing in such company, Emmot?" Lady Janet asked. "I thought better of you."

"Mother's orders," the girl drawled with a soft lisp, her tone defensive. "She says being with the Duchess gives me my chance, she has such lots of men in her train. I don't quite know what sort of chance my mother is driving at. I've told her that the Duchess says it doesn't matter what you do physically so long as your mind is pure. Mother declares she only says that to the married women, and tells me that I must marry, and play my cards to that end. Talking about cards, the Duchess wins every time; she clears us all out. We don't call her Duchess of Dollars any more. We call her Duchess of Chisel'em."

"It's a kind of chiselling to allow yourself to be chiselled," Lady Janet admonished her. "And as to the Duchess's advice——!"

"'Doesn't matter what you do,' et cetera," the girl interrupted, the reckless words sounding pathetic in her soft, drawling lisp. "Suits my temperament, the whole thing, I rather guess, or I shouldn't be able to stand it. But I confess I can't place mother."

"That's bravado, Emmot," Lady Janet said. "Chuck it."

"What am I to do?" the girl answered despairingly. "I'm stony—and over head and ears in debt, besides."

"Apprentice yourself to Ella Banks and learn to make lace."

"I would like a shot if I even know how to thread a needle; but I haven't been taught how to do a single useful thing, and it's too late now."

"Nonsense. Come to me to-morrow morning at nine o'clock,

and I'll engage to set you up on your own independent feet, if you will determine to help yourself out of it all."

The girl looked at her, grew red in the face, stammered promises and thanks confusedly, and hurried off to rejoin the Duchess.

"Will she come?" Lady Janet wondered. "She was such a nice child before she came out. But she's of the same temperament as Maud Ballard and Sarb, who was the sweetest thing before her husband corrupted her, and look at her now!"

Ella was looking at Lady Janet aghast. "What does it all mean?" she cried.

"It means that you're entertaining the most awful crew, Ella."

"Crew? I haven't noticed anything wrong!"

"Oh, blind bat! What are you thinking of? Yet you couldn't very well know without being told that the Duchess of Chisleham's house is a notorious gambling hell, or that your most frequent visitors now are all more or less Lady Regular Bad'uns."

"Do you mean—*immoral?*" Ella gasped.

"That's what I mean," Lady Janet answered bluntly.

It was some seconds before Ella could speak again. At last she said under her breath in a horrified tone: "How must they feel!"

"Immoral women?" Lady Janet laughed cynically. "You don't suppose they feel immoral! They wouldn't be immoral if they did. The nastiness of it all is only felt by the moral women. 'I'm a sensualist. Can't help it. Was born so,' one of them said to me in a moment of expansion. And she wasn't excusing herself. She just stopped short of boasting of it, like one conscious of being something worth mentioning, but modestly forbearing to emphasise the distinction."

"Does that woman come here?" Ella asked in a hard tone.

"She does. She's here now probably. Col Drindon dubbed her 'Red Ruin and the Breaking up of Laws,' because of the disorders of her life."

"And he never warned me!" Ella accused him.

"You've not been one to be warned, Ella Banks," Lady Janet accused her.

"I won't have her here! I won't have any of them here!" Ella burst out, stamping her foot.

"How are you going to prevent it?" Lady Janet asked.

"Until they are tried in a court of law and found guilty Majesty herself has to presume them innocent and receive them. Besides, the innocent would suffer with the guilty, if hearsay evidence were admissible. The calumny devil, 'the shabbiest devil of all,' doesn't discriminate. Do you suppose you've escaped yourself? You babe! What have you been doing with your eyes and your ears to let your house become a happy grazing-ground for Satan's Shepherdesses? There's Cressida Taxidos—too blatant to be 'false as Cressid.' She lets you know!

"Fie, fie upon her!
There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out
At every joint and motive of her body.
O, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
That give accosting welcome ere it comes,
And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts
To every ticklish reader! set them down
For sluttish spoils of opportunity,
And daughters of the game."

She stopped short for want of breath.

Ella was staring at her with dilated eyes, white-faced, stunned. Lady Janet caught her hand and dragged her to a seat. She thought she was going to faint. There were few people about now. It was getting late.

"Oh, forgive me!" Lady Janet exclaimed. "I didn't know I was giving you such a shock. What has your guardian angel, Gregor Strangworth, been thinking of—— Where is he?"

"Somewhere, abroad."

The words fell from Ella mechanically.

Lady Janet was disappointed and relieved. She would not see him herself, but at all events he had not been hanging about Ella. The relief softened her. She repented her of having struck so hard, and was for healing the wound.

"You're not to blame," she said, laying her hand on Ella's. "You are suffering from the faults of your qualities. To the pure all things are pure, and it's very beautiful to have 'The sense of tears in mortal things' without having the sense of wickedness, but it's no protection——"

"And this is Society, the sought-after!" Ella broke in bitterly.

"Only the tail of it, dragging in the dirt."

"You might well say that the world is no better than it ever was! I won't have any more men here."

"Rash maiden, make no vows!" Lady Janet laughed cynically. "You're a Pioneer, therefore don't rely upon women. They will distrust and oppose you till you succeed, and afterwards they will ignore you if they don't actually trample you to death in a stampede to secure for themselves the advantages you have won for them. If you want a sidelight on what to expect of women, hear them discuss a successful pioneer! You will find that for one who whole-heartedly applauds her achievement there will be nine hundred and ninety-nine expressing some petty personal objection to her; or, more often, if she does not appear amongst them, some invidious story. The general note is a note of detraction."

"I used to believe in women," Ella sighed.

"Oh! believe in them, as much as you believe in men, but no more. And, if you want things done, make the men your friends."

"This from you——?" said Ella.

"Who don't respect men? Well, I don't. But I do respect their business capacity. . . . Perhaps I should say I don't and I do respect men," she revised. "But man is more ludicrous to me than anything; I have always to think before I can feel that he is also pathetic——"

"What is Janet barking at?"

Had Janet not been "barking," with her head down, she would not have been taken by surprise.

"Gregor!" she exclaimed, jumping up.

Ella, also startled, did the same. Each felt, though for a different reason, as if she had been roused from a nightmare-dream of trouble to a happy reality.

"Oh, but it's good to see you!" cried Ella. "Now I feel safe!"

He stood before them in a tweed suit with a Homberg hat in his hand; the big, strong, reliable man, looking at them humorously, his large deliberateness a contrast to their feminine agitation.

"I may stay for a little?"

The question was addressed to Ella. Taking her permission for granted he fetched himself a chair, and sat down facing them.

"Now we're all safe for ten minutes," he said.

"I was told you were abroad," said Lady Janet.

"You were not misinformed," he replied. "I awoke in foreign parts this morning. Excuse my suit. I should have missed you if I had waited to change."

"Did you wait to eat?" Ella asked. Her hospitable heart perceived that he had not. "Come to my sitting-room," she insisted. "We can't talk to a starving man. And, that reminds me, neither Lady Janet nor I have had tea."

This argument prevailed with him. In a few minutes they were all eating together, he hungrily, of substantial viands, the other two nibbling cakes to keep him in countenance.

"I don't believe the world is topsy-turvy," Ella declared irrelevantly.

In the quiet of that spacious room of hers, where all was order and freshness, it was, indeed, hard to believe it.

"The confusion has not got into your atmosphere as yet, at all events," he observed enigmatically.

"Why do you say that when we are happy?" she reproached him. "It sounds portentous."

"It only means that he is a dissatisfied man for want of a cigarette," said Lady Janet.

"I'll send for some," said Ella, jumping up.

"If you really don't mind and will allow me." He took out his cigarette-case.

"One for me, too," said Lady Janet, holding out her hand. "You'll see, Ella! Evil omens vanish in smoke."

Mr. Strangworth settled himself in his chair, as if for a long visit, and announced that he was in a hurry. This set them smiling. "At least I ought to be," he added. "My business takes me abroad again to-night, and I have still several things to do."

"I wonder what your business is," slipped from Ella. "Oh, I am crude," she apologised, immediately aware of the solecism. "Do excuse me. The common daughter of a small tenant farmer hasn't the inbred reticence——" she broke off abruptly.

"I can't excuse you for calling yourself what you are not—common," said Mr. Strangworth.

"I've hurt myself," she complained. "I feel as if I had said something—derogatory—about my father."

Mr. Strangworth examined the end of his cigarette intently. "You are loyal," he said at last, his eyes on her, watching

the effect of his words; "but you are hard on wrongdoers. Suppose—may I, without wounding you, suppose such a thing? Suppose your father had done something very wrong, something that put a stigma on you—what would be your attitude towards him?"

"Knowing him as I do, I should be sure that there was some excuse for him," she answered positively.

"But if there could be no doubt of this—er—stigma?"

"I should cling to him with both hands. I should be glad to take his punishment on myself if I could. Wouldn't you—for a father whose goodness had never failed you?"

Again Mr. Strangworth examined the end of his cigarette intently. "I wish your father had heard you say that," he said. "It would have done his heart good."

"He would have been amused at your proposition," she answered drily. "He couldn't, even for the sake of argument, imagine himself doing wrong. You don't know the rectitude of old Ellery Banks!"

"Excuse me, I do know the rectitude of 'old Ellery Banks,'" he answered, smiling. "It is you that I don't quite know. That is why I asked the question."

"I call it a cruel question," Lady Janet burst out. "Vivisection!"

"Janet—barking again!" he exclaimed. "By the way, what was Janet barking at when I came in?"

"Barking for you, I believe," said Ella lightly, little dreaming how truly she spoke.

"To support my contention," Lady Janet broke in with a heightened colour, accusing Ella with an indignant glance of having given her away. "You agree with me about women, don't you?"

"What was your contention?" he asked cautiously.

"That they are not grateful," she rattled on, making women generally pay for Ella's indiscretion; "that they fall upon the spoils of victory but seldom honour the victor. Win a battle for them and you become the object of their most spiteful attacks. It seems to worry women to have a champion still alive. Once they secure the profits of her enterprise they turn on her. No credit to whom credit is due—that is in effect the attitude of women towards each other. Give me men to work with!"

"Women can be pretty hard on each other," he observed.

She took it with a little disconcerted laugh. "I give you the result of my practical experience," she excused herself. "It is as unkind to women as it is to children to ignore their faults."

"Well," he conceded, "I have myself found that if you want to know what any one woman has to her credit in the way of something accomplished for the benefit of mankind, you'll find the cleanest record kept by men. But I'm always telling you, Janet, it is six of one and half a dozen of the other. Men can be pretty mean too."

"We don't expect so much of men," said Lady Janet loftily.

"Oh, you don't!" he said with a twinkle.

"I maintain," she went on, irritated because he seemed amused, "I maintain that the nobler kind of woman, on whom you can rely, is, at the present period of our progress, a *rara avis* indeed."

"Everything that is said of women, good and bad, is true of some; a kindly providence seems to have ordered it so, in the interests of essayists, that the subject may not fail them whatever their mood—— Have another cigarette?" And he held out his case to Lady Janet.

"How peaceful it is here," she said, when he had lighted the cigarette for her, sinking back in her chair. "Why don't you smoke, Ella?"

"Ella's physique is self-supporting," Mr. Strangworth answered for her, with approval.

"I am reproached!" said Lady Janet. "How like a man! Refusing women the prop on which he leans himself!"

"A touch of the old Adam in me," he acknowledged good-humouredly. "I'm fairly convicted."

"Even you, you brute!" she answered gaily. "Women always come off second-best, are always expected to do the noble self-denying business—let what will be toward—originally, no doubt, so that men might have the lion's share of whatever was going. (I'm not accusing you of that, Mr. Strangworth.) But even the lover in the song, has his eye on the lion's share. Doesn't he sing:

Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will drink to thee. . . .

and so secures all the champagne? How do you get out of that?"

"By quoting correctly," he replied.

"Oh, don't! don't!" she implored, fearful of tapping the didactic vein. "I don't care how he put it; that was what he meant."

Mr. Strangworth smiled at her quizzically. "With regard to women," he recommenced, "I should like to remark, by way of burying the hatchet—your hatchet—that, of late years, I have observed the growth in the younger women of greater consideration for each other. I recognise a prevalent attempt to believe in and stand by each other——"

"Foiled by the impossibility——"

"Lady Janet is incorrigible this afternoon," said Ella, who had listened amusedly to their badinage.

Lady Janet thought a moment, then said: "Perhaps I am making the mistake of judging by my own class, instead of by what would be your class—the progressive one, I mean—if you were not above all classes, Ella."

"What does she mean?" Ella asked, looking at Mr. Strangworth.

"Can *you* place Ella?" Lady Janet asked him, defending her standpoint.

Mr. Strangworth looked at the clock. "Oh, Time!" he apostrophised it. "Why won't you stand still, just once in a way, when you're wanted to!"

Lady Janet, warned by this bald evasion that her question had embarrassed him somehow, tacked off skilfully: "Did ever man more clearly confess himself bored!" she inquired of the ceiling. "If only I had a good old truism at command to slate him with!"

"The obvious is restful," he riposted; "and good old truisms are firm ground to jump to from the marsh of sloppy thinking."

"Now I am accused of 'sloppy thinking,'" Lady Janet confided to the end of her cigarette.

"And I am evidently out of favour to-day," he grumbled, in affected despair.

"On the contrary!" she exclaimed. "You've been perfectly delightful to-day, Gregor dear. You haven't been by way of teaching us anything."

"I've abandoned the attempt as hopeless," he rejoined, comparing his watch with the clock on the mantelpiece. "Plenty of time," he added.

"Since when?" Lady Janet asked in surprise. "You a hurry just now."

"Since I remembered that there is a night-train minster," he replied.

"Closeminster—for Castlefield Saye!" Ella exclaime

"Do you call Castlefield Saye abroad?" Lady Jan wondering what had been said to account for what she was a sudden change of plan.

"It is on the way," he answered, not to be drawn I give messages from you to all inquiring friends, El

"Give my dear love to all who desire it," she clasping her hands.

"Shall I say that all is well with you?"

"Yes. All will be well with me when I have had s disorder I have discovered in my house set right—w be immediately."

"Ah!" he ejaculated. "You have 'discovered' some order in your house then? That was what I came to you about."

"Guardian Angel!" said Lady Janet under her breat

But he overheard and turned on her. "With a *locum-tenens,* it seems——"

"Who was not officially entrusted with the post, would have been no cause for complaint," she caught

"The post is officially offered to her now. I may be abroad for some time," he said significantly.

"She accepts," said Lady Janet.

Ella, drawing herself up, looked from one to the oth spoke, her pride resenting their assumption of the watch over her, which argued the necessity, as if she able to take care of herself! But on second thou suppressed her feelings. Such friends mean too w treated with anything but gratitude, even when officious.

Intent on her own thoughts, she did not hear wha they said to each other, until the words, spoken by M worth, "I have another favour to ask you," recalled he ing attention. He paused when he had spoken, and it to her that he might have something to say which w her ears. She rose.

"I am glad to have seen you, Ella," he said, rising holding out his hand.

Then she knew that she was right to leave them alone together. "You will excuse me," she said. "I have much to see to. But don't hurry away."

"Things will be different when we meet again," he said cheerfully.

"Things will be on quite another footing," she answered.

She was thinking of the difference in her position that Melton would make, he of quite another matter. They were both right as to a change of relations impending, but far from foreseeing what it was to be.

Having shut the door upon Ella, Mr. Strangworth returned to Lady Janet, who was standing now, nervously wondering what the favour was he had to ask of her, but sure—with the assurance that hopes it is mistaken—that it was not the supreme favour she would so gladly have accorded him.

The haste he had talked so much about seemed genuine now. He did not sit down again, and she was hurt,—so little time for her, so much for Ella Banks!

"I want you to take a case in hand for me, Janet dear," he began without preamble, "one of my many failures, and a difficult case for anybody, but not incurable."

"Not another woman, I hope!" she exclaimed.

"No," he replied, "but a case for a woman. A man—a very soul-sick, suffering, *old* man, who admires and respects you above all women."

"Lord Terry de Beach," she guessed.

"How clever you are, and how much you know!" he laughed.

"But what about the parasite Harkles?" she suggested as a difficulty.

"He has been shaken off for the moment, but he'll find his way back somehow," he answered, reflectively. "It would be best to stop his nourishment; he'll drop off then of his own accord. It is sheer greed keeps him attached. He has enough of his own to live and dress on to his heart's content, and he will always attract women of like mind and motives, who will keep him company and supply him with luxuries. If our way of thinking became the fashion, he would turn his coat and be dressed for the part and look it, as he dresses for and looks his present part of fastidious man about town. His nature is not to be changed. He was born a parasite, of the kind that infests people in high places, and lives on them, and is all

the time injuring them. But you know him for what he is. I rely on your woman's wit to get rid of him."

"It is a terrible task you are setting me," she replied, glad all the same of his confidence in her.

"You are not afraid of it?"

"Afraid!" She smiled derisively. When was one of her breed ever afraid of anything! "But how, *how* am I to get hold of the poor old man?"

"By his heart, Janet dear, by his heart. Wrong-headed is not wrong-hearted, you know. Wrong-headedness makes the task difficult but not impossible. Where there is a big heart there is love for the soul to feed upon, and though it be imprisoned it grows and is galled by its fetters and clamours for the help it needs to liberate itself. The old Terrier's strength and his weakness are in his heart. He is capable of strong and loyal affection, but habit also attaches him to people. He despises the parasite Harkles, but has a liking for him too, born of their long association. The only hope for him is to wean him of such likings——"

"I will do anything in the world I can for the old man, but marry him——"

"Good Lord, no! You mustn't marry him!" Mr. Strangworth exclaimed in consternation. "Don't marry again, ever, Janet dear. I should lose you as a coadjutor if you did."

The words, affectionately spoken, knelled her one hope of happiness, but she smiled courageously.

"All right, Gregor dear," she said. "I'll prepare for the attack, and shall strike at the first opportunity. I foresee what will happen. When you come again you'll find the Terrier between me and Mr. Harkles,—supported by me on the one side, and on the other by Mr. Harkles, with his coat turned."

4

Ella seeking Beveridge found him disagreeing with Pecky Tim in the hall.

"Beveridge," she said shortly, "in future no one is to be allowed to go into any of the rooms but the showroom, on any pretence whatever. The doors must be locked."

"Very good, my lady."

When she was out of hearing, Pecky Tim mimicked her in a high, squeaky voice: "Beveridge, no one is to be allowed to go into any of the rooms——"

But a "clout on the 'ead" cut short the performance and kept Pecky Tim quiet and thoughtful for a considerable time.

Ella sought the Argus-Eyed next and found her—the hour of her release not having struck—still seated at her high desk, steadfast to duty and mechanically watchful, though the room was empty and there was nothing to be done.

"Mrs. Pilbeam," she said, "in future no one is to be allowed to go into any of the rooms but the showroom, on any pretence whatever."

"Right you are, Miss Banks," the Argus-Eyed answered heartily. "I thought you'd see it in time."

"Then you knew what was going on? Why didn't you warn me?" Ella asked severely.

The Argus-Eyed compressed her lips and began to write with a dry pen on the blotting paper. "I didn't expostulate, Miss Banks, I suppose," she said, shaking her head at Ella's injustice.

"You did say something about not letting people make free with the drawing-rooms," Ella acknowledged.

"And *you* said, Miss Banks, 'What does it matter?'"

"You should have explained," Ella blamed her.

"I only needed to be asked, Miss Banks," said the Argus-Eyed, laying down her pen, "and then I could only have given you my own ideas. I knew nothing for certain, I know nothing for certain now. And you're one for facts. And one as doesn't take kindly to advice, I'll make bold for once to say, and have done with it."

She folded her arms on her ample bosom, leant back in her chair, looked straight before her, and awaited the consequences. If she had looked at Ella she would have seen the dawn of compunction.

"I am one to act upon information," was the answer she got.

"Which not being had couldn't be given, Miss Banks; be reasonable," and the Argus-Eyed smiled on her maternally. "And what *I* say, Miss Banks, is better late than never, not that it matters much either way now"—she gave her an arch glance—"for there'll not be much more doings here, good or bad, or I don't know what a gentleman means when he comes with honourable intentions towards one I love and respect, though it is to take her away and scatter us and the whole

concern to the four winds of heaven, so to speak," and she sighed at the prospect.

"Oh, no, not that, *dear* Mrs. Pilbeam!" Ella cried, smiling at last. "I am one to be true to my friends, even if I am not one to be advised."

"You hit me fair, Miss Banks," said the Argus-Eyed. "You've a noble nature I do agree, though it's Miss Hildenborough's remark properly speaking—she's floury as a miller but with a grain of sense in it once in a way."

Miss Hildenborough, who, at the far end of the room putting things straight in a cabinet, had hurried up with her job to be in time for the talk at the desk, now joined them. "Do you hear that wind, Miss Banks?" she broke out. "My word! It does sound sorrowful!"

There's been that in the wind all day I've not liked," said the Argus-Eyed, glancing up through a window opposite at the sombre sky just visible above the housetops. "And there's the clock striking at last" She prepared to rise with a sigh of relief. "If you're like me, you'll be glad of your tea."

"A rhyme!" Miss Hildenborough exclaimed. "You've got a wish, Mrs. Pilbeam."

"I wish God bless us all!" came promptly from the Argus-Eyed.

"That makes me safe," said Ella with a smile, and left them. "Safe" was her word that afternoon.

"You might have done better than that, more appropriate under the circumstances, Mrs. Pilbeam," Miss Hildenborough observed sentimentally, with her eyes upon Ella.

"How could I do better than that?" the Argus-Eyed was down on her.

"Don't snap my head off, Mrs. Pilbeam. You aren't God, high as you sit up there looking down on us all," Miss Hildenborough retorted. "Here, lean on my shoulder, and I'll help you down if you're not too proud."

The Argus-Eyed had risen. She was stiff with long sitting, and short legs were not good at negotiating the high step down from the platform, but you can't be beholden to an adversary, not till you make it up with a counter-stroke that sets you even, so she ignored the proffered assistance, and looked into her desk to gain time.

Ella, moving slowly, was making for her curtained recess with no definite intention. Her course from the desk to the

recess was diagonal, and she was not following it directly but zigzagging as if to prolong the way, stepping to one side, stopping, slowly turning round, looking about her.

"She glides like a swan upon the waters of life," Miss Hildenborough noted, clasping her hands ecstatically.

"She'd glide you and swan you too if she heard you," the Argus-Eyed struck. "If silly-fool talk was at a premium, what a fortune you'd make, Miss Hildenborough! Here, lend us a hand down with your shoulder. Your flesh is something solid to lean upon, there's that to your credit."

"The flesh is willing if the mind is weak," Miss Hildenborough retorted acidly, but at the same time rendering the kindliest assistance. "The mind needn't show ugly, strong or weak, but flesh which you can't conceal isn't to be dressed becomingly, squeeze it in where you will."

"Are you alluding to me, Miss Hildenborough, with your flesh and your squeezing?" the Argus-Eyed demanded.

"If you alluded to me with your silly-fool talk," Miss Hildenborough retorted, tossing her head.

"You're a oner to wrangle, Miss Hildenborough," said the Argus-Eyed, toddling off stiffly. "But it takes two to make a quarrel, and I'm for taking tea, which you'll be the better of, too."

"Which is sense anyhow, whatever isn't," Miss Hildenborough had it, as she followed her. "It'll be something like a tea to-day with the things left over. Not that I'm complaining. You couldn't live better. I'm meaning food. But there's more in living than eating, I know. . . . Take my arm down the stairs, Mrs. Pilbeam, they're dark and you're tired."

"I will, thank you kindly, Miss Hildenborough. There's more in living than eating and it's dark on the stairs, and I'm tired, as you say, which is being right every way when all's said and done. Say—way, another rhyme. Which I can't do better I still maintain and always shall, say what you like, than wish, 'God bless us,' only now I say 'God forgive us,' too. We're none of us perfect." Thus the Argus-Eyed, offering terms of peace, which Miss Hildenborough accepted as honourable. The compact was sealed with smiles.

Ella had no conception of herself as a swan gliding on the waters of life, though the metaphor was apt enough, as regarded her movements. But swans may be presumed to sweep slowly around in utter content with themselves and their pool, and her

sensations were very much the opposite. She felt tawdry in her business finery and was despising herself in the rôle of *mannequin*. To be "on view" in a crowd she respected, with only respectful eyes upon her, was one thing, but to be stared at by people such as she now considered them, an idle, vicious, corrupt-minded crew, was quite another. It was degrading. She looked about her and found food for dissatisfaction in all she saw. The room was in spotless order. Every speck of dust had been swept from the floor when the people had gone, but the sombre day clouded the polished surface, and the reflections of the great chandeliers, usually so clear in its shining depths, were distorted. Ella took it that the very floor was polluted by the feet that had trodden it, past all cleansing.

The day had dried its eyes like a widow who is the more mournful for the tears that remain unshed. There was rain still in the low dark clouds, and the wind came sorrowing round the house in sobbing gusts like mourners to a funeral. Ella stood in the recess looking out. Mr. Strangworth was seeing Lady Janet into her carriage. His leave-taking was abrupt. He raised his hat and hurried off before she was well seated. The smile left her lips on the instant. Her whole bearing expressed impatience and discontent. As the carriage passed she looked up, and seeing Ella bowed formally. Ella returned the compliment in like manner.

"How can he expect me to find time for *her* affairs!" Lady Janet was thinking in jealous soreness of heart.

"I can take care of myself, dear lady," Ella had it in her pride. So they settled in their own minds to make the post of Guardian Angel a sinecure.

Ella returned to the showroom on her way to change her dress. The folding-doors into the hall were closed, the desk was deserted, the whole big, beautiful room seemed bare and empty with a bareness and emptiness she had never felt before. The sitting-room would be bare and empty, too, now that Mr. Strangworth had gone; but she must go that way in order to get to her bedroom by the back staircase, for she would not be seen again in this theatrical guise. The Duke's tender solicitude for her loneliness recurred to her; was anybody ever as lonely? She pitied herself.

As she entered her sitting-room by one door, Melton came in breezily by the other. The sight of him was a shock of de-

light! A relief! A surprise! She had forgotten him—that was the curious thing.

He kissed her, then held her off to look at her, a way he had. "How splendid you are in that dress!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I am hateful in this dress!" she answered passionately. "I'm not human. I'm a lay figure. I was just going to change it and throw it away."

"Lace and all?" he asked laughingly.

Reminded of that unreplaceable treasure, she plainly hesitated. "But I'll clean it," she vowed.

"It looks clean enough," he said. "Has it been morally contaminated?"

"That's just it," she replied, and then she burst out with her grievances.

Naturally, none of the gossip in which his father was implicated had reached Melton, nor had anyone ventured to mention Ella herself disrespectfully in his hearing. The ægis of his mother's protection prevented that among the people with whom he associated. He was not a frequenter of the Land and Leisure Club. At first he was incredulous—Lady Janet was mistaken.

"But what is 'an assignation'?" Ella asked. "Would a man like Monsignor Caffany have used such a word if it had not truly applied to what he saw? I tell you he meant it. He meant to open my eyes with it. They've been making their assignations here in my house, polluting it."

He walked up and down the room for a little, agitated, frowning, then stopped before her. "You must turn them all out and shut up shop at once, Ella," he said decisively.

"What, now, when the money is pouring in!" she exclaimed.

"Surely, Ella, you don't care so much for money!" he reproached her. "We shall have plenty."

"It is money for my lacemakers that is pouring in," she said, hurt that he should have thought she was speaking for herself.

"Can't the concern be carried on by deputy?" he suggested.

"Oh, man of the world! Who would look at a deputy?" she pointed out.

"It is torture to me to think of how they look at you, some of them," he protested.

She winced at that. It was torture to her too, now that she could appraise their minds, but she had the interests of her lacemakers at heart. She must guard them at all costs. "But

my workers!" she cried, clasping her hands. "What is to become of them? If I desert my post the sale of their lace will stop, and they will fall into the hands of the middleman again and be starved."

He sat down beside her. "Look here, Ella," he said, "there's only one thing for it, as I've told you all along. We must be married at once. That will make a clean sweep of all the undesirable people. The very fact of your being my wife will bring a very different set about you. You can carry on this work all the same, you know. I should like it if it pleases you, and Society will approve if I do. You'll be in a position to do more for your workers then than you've ever yet been able to do. You'll see!"

She had foreseen this all along. He could not have used a better argument. "But the Duke," she objected. "We must have his approval——"

"We'll ask for it as soon as we're married——"

"No," she cried, "he must be consulted. It would annoy him—hurt him. I can't do that."

"I believe it is my father that you are in love with," he said, half-laughing, half-exasperated.

"I do love him," she answered earnestly. "If I married you without his approval I should be the most deceitful, ungrateful, disloyal wretch alive; and I should feel myself so, and despise myself forever after."

"Now, Ella, dearest," he expostulated, "don't stand upon that. It's not fair to my father. To ask for his consent would put him in an impossible position. And he's such a good sort, my dad," the young man added, smiling at pleasant recollections. "When we were little chaps—and always. I've never known him to say or do a thing I would have had otherwise. He's so chivalrous. You should see him with the Little Lady —my mother, you know. Between ourselves—— Well, there!" he broke off. "I don't know whether it is you as an experience, or whether it is going round the world. Going round the world does open one's eyes. I see my father and mother's relations to each other quite differently since I came home. But I'm not criticising my parents, I'm only trying to understand them——" Again he broke off.

His own love had enlightened him. There is no routine in the service of love. Love never misses opportunities because they are not in the regular round. With duty it is different.

Duty sets itself a task it does not delight in, and confines itself to the strict observance. The Duke in his great kindness had determined that his wife should never feel herself neglected. He felt himself indebted to her as the mother of his children, and however impatient he might be of her limitations he did not blame her for them, he pitied her, and would not have her suffer. But his attentions were painstaking and unvaried, and this his son had detected. Knowing now the difference between the service of duty and the service of love, the inevitable conclusion was forced upon him—also the corollary which he felt to be just, that a man is in honour bound to make compensation for the defection of his heart, by every means in his power.

"Consideration for my mother's feelings is the habit of my father's life," he went on. "If he opposed her in this matter it would be a mortal wound, a proof that he cared less for her than for his own ideas. It will be much kinder for us to take the law into our own hands, then no blame can attach to him. When we throw ourselves at his feet, he will bless us for that, at all events. And he will bless our union too, I know he will. It would be a falsification of his whole theory of life to object."

But the Winged Victory, on the threshold of success, hesitated. She shrank, almost with repugnance, from taking the final step, and she obstinately refused to take it, save on the one condition. They must have the Duke's consent.

Melton's patience was exhausted at last, and he left her angrily. He accused her of playing with him, of coquetting, of not caring for him, then wiped all that out as nonsense; he knew better; only on this he was determined, that he would not come near her again until she sent for him. "I shall know when you send for me that you have come to your senses and consent," he said. "In the meantime, I hope the separation will make you as miserable as it will make me."

It did not to begin with. Her first feeling after he had gone was one of relief.

5

Her first feeling persisted. It was as if she had escaped subjugation and come into the possession of herself again. She had no fear of losing Melton. When the string that binds a man to a woman is tied to his heart the length of it does not

matter. He feels the tug of it wherever he goes. It pained her to think of him miserable, but there was no help for that. Every right feeling in her was against a clandestine marriage with her benefactor's eldest son. Such base ingratitude was not to be thought of. She must know the Duke's mind on the subject. She did not know what she would do if he disapproved of the match, but come what might, she would do nothing underhand. To deceive the Duke was to be false and mean, and it was not in her to be either.

Then there was her house to be set in order. She only could do that satisfactorily, but the task required full self-possession. She did not throw her beautiful dress away; she repented her of the impulse as vindictive. She had not dressed for self-glorification, but on principle, for the benefit of her workers. And she had benefited them, richly, and without loss of self-respect, and would again. Not all eyes had an insult in them. She would cast out those that had. How, exactly, she had not determined. Summary ejectment her practical good sense showed her to be impossible. She must wait for the inspiration of the moment.

The question of dress for her next at home day was serious. Her womanly readiness to sacrifice herself for the benefit of her workers, and her equally womanly horror of attracting undesirable attention, made the choice difficult. She had a consignment of new lace to advertise, and a difference of hundreds and hundreds of pounds more or less for her poor girls depended on how the lace looked when worn, and that meant on how she looked in it. There was no help for it. She must look her best. But it must be a subdued best, and for that black was the only wear. It would be a novelty too, as she had never yet appeared in black. Should it be Caen, Bayeux, or Chantilly? There was some of each in the new parcel, and the difference is almost indistinguishable. These were "piece goods," small strips joined by the famous *point de raccroc* stitch, which had won Harkles Superbus his sub-title of "Old Point de Raccroc" because of his trick of putting two-and-two together. That would tickle their fancy, and the history of the stitch would concentrate their attention on the lace. Probably Chantilly was the only one of the three laces any of them knew by name. They would guess at that and pose complacently as connoisseurs when they found themselves right. Lace was the rage, and not to know one kind from another

was to be all out of it. Chantilly it must be. She had a week to prepare.

She went down to the showroom before the people began to arrive for the occasion, to try the effect on her aides-de-camp.

"Regal," was the Argus-Eyed's first laconic statement.

"My word! Miss Banks," Miss Hildenborough gushed, "I shall need my order-book to-day! Not a jewel neither!"

"Chaste, I call it," the Argus-Eyed amended her first impression.

The word was reassuring.

Ella held herself apart, affecting to be deep in conversation with Miss Hildenborough, that she might excusably ignore people as they dropped in. Mr. Harkles was the first she knew by name. He had attempted a costume in character with his opinion of the house and hostess; disguisedly fast, that is to say, fastness being suggested by unexpected flashes of colour on a grey ground produced by flourishing a scarlet silk handkerchief and sticking out his foot, so as to show a scarlet sock above his patent-leather shoe. He prided himself particularly on the subtle suggestiveness of his tie, quaker-grey shot with sinful scarlet and arranged so that enough of the sinfulness appeared to show that it was there. He carried an umbrella, but not the one that was never unfolded or opened. That he only took into best society.

Ella heard a soft, drawling voice lisping behind her: "Are your mother and sisters here?"

"Rather not! They don't come here any more, you bet!" was the answer, coarsely spoken and intended for her ears, Ella was sure. She recognised Filmer Dabbs, junior, by the voice, and the girl Emmot, who last week had declared to Lady Janet that she was in a hopeless position, over head and ears in debt. "My mother and sisters don't come here any more. They're partic'lar," Filmer added.

There was a pause, then the soft, lisping voice, with the pathetic note in it, drawled evenly: "I am complimented, Mr. Filmer Dabbs."

"Oh, Lady Emmot, I assure you——" he spluttered. "Swells like you, young ladies who don't understand—your brother shouldn't have brought you. I look better after my sisters. But I'd look best after a wife——"

The rest was inaudible, but the answer was clearly drawled: "A wife of my tastes and habits is an expensive luxury."

"I could settle four figures a year on you," he replied eagerly.

"That might only be one thousand pounds," she objected.

"It depends on what Callowabbey wants with my sister Muriel——"

"Does my brother propose to marry your sister Muriel?"

There was no inflection of feeling in the soft, even, lisping drawl. She might have bargained about the sale of a horse in just the same tone. They moved away as she spoke, and his answer was inaudible to Ella, but she had heard enough to make her shiver with disgust. Lady Janet's attempted salvage had failed. The girl was selling herself.

Sister to Callowabbey. She saw him in the distance with the Sliver. They were both grimacing. There was a little commotion at that end of the room. Lady Cruxhaven, Princess Taxidos, and Lady Ballard and Sarb were in it with Mr. Harkles, The O'Haleron, and the other two. The O'Haleron left the group abruptly. He was frowning. Ella put herself in his way, determined to give him the cut direct, but she had always liked him, and her glance reproached him involuntarily when their eyes met. He knew himself both cut and reproached. The colour flew to his forehead, he hung his head, and walked out of the house, conscience-stricken and repentant.

The locked doors were, of course, the cause of the commotion. Ella expected to be attacked when the council of war at the end of the room was over. She stood valiantly conspicuous, eager for the fray. If only they would ask her for an explanation! But they were far too clever for that. The Lace Girl, indeed! What was she to offer them such an affront!

As they approached their faces expressed the friendliest concern.

"In mourning!" Red Ruin exclaimed.

"Not for anyone near and dear, I hope," said Lady Ballard and Sarb, ready to be genuinely sympathetic, in spite of herself.

"No, only for the Sins of Society," escaped Ella, the simple truth forcing utterance.

"At how many guineas a yard?" Princess Taxidos chimed in, harsh-voiced and cynical.

"She doesn't sell her 'personal possessions,' you know," Lady Cruxhaven cooed, falsely smiling.

Ella's excuse to the Duchess of Chiselham coming round to her again like that, had a sting in it.

"And is this a priceless original too?" Princess Taxidos asked, peering into the Chantilly.

"How delightful to be able to afford to wear priceless originals!" sighed Lady Ballard and Sarb.

"It would be worth being the adored one of a great territorial magnate to have the chance, even though he were rather old and not at all romantic in appearance," Red Ruin followed on.

"Costs a pretty penny, your establishment, horses, and carriages and all, I should think, Miss Ella Banks," Princess Taxidos had at her, with characteristic coarseness.

"The de-ar Duke is certainly generous," Lady Ballard and Sarb gave him credit.

"What are a few thousands a year to him!" Red Ruin subtracted from it.

"For value received too," Princess Taxidos got in.

"I don't think I could stand such an elderly man myself," Lady Ballard and Sarb reflected. "I couldn't do more than respect him with a kiss now and then on his cheek. Though, of course, he is a great dear. I am sure he would marry you, Ella, if Good Gracious went to heaven."

That was enough. They waited, their malicious eyes on her, expecting an effect. None was apparent. She looked from one to the other, as she had done while each one was speaking, but with no more sign of understanding than there would have been on the face of a statue. Her incomprehension and silence were baffling. *"Silly women led away by fleshly lusts,"* as they were, she stood out against them, her natural distinction enhanced by the sombre black of her dress, as nobility of character stands out in contrast to vulgar-mindedness. It was purity confronted by corruption. And all at once it came over her that these were immoral women. Ill-odoured. . . .

She shrank from them, grimacing as if an actual stench had assailed her nostrils.

Miss Hildenborough noticed her sudden pallor and came hurrying up.

"Attend to these people, Miss Hildenborough, if you can," she said. "They make me sick."

But Miss Hildenborough was for attending to her first, and followed after her.

"Did you hear *that*?" Lady Ballard and Sarb cried. "'These people'—*us!* She meant *us!* She meant *we* made her sick. She meant to be rude to *us*—that *low* woman!"

"Scored, by the Lord Harry!" Princess Taxidos burst out admiringly. "I call that sporting."

"I shall not come here again," Lady Ballard and Sarb vowed with an indignant stamp.

"What would be the use?" Red Ruin mourned. "No more little parties in the locked-up rooms, and no fun in that crowd —what use indeed!"

"She's done us, *bless* her!" said Princess Taxidos. "Always the Winged Victory! Scores every time. No, we can't come again. She's given us it fairly—how do you say it? Given us the sack!"

Ella, flying from contamination, ran headlong into Mr. Harkles, and before she had recovered herself he got in a hit which provoked her to retort.

"Why this haste?" he said. "He has not arrived."

"Who?" she demanded.

"Your lordly admirer."

She thought of Melton. "So many pose as admirers of mine," she said.

"This one does not pose."

"Exceptional man!"

"Dukes *are* exceptional."

She turned on him then with a flash that made him recoil. He gave anyone who would listen to him his word afterwards that the devil blazed out of her eyes, and she'd have killed him there and then if there'd been a weapon handy. It was the fury of a witch found out, never saw anything like it. All in that one look, by Jove! And then she went.

6

She locked herself in her sitting-room, and stood for some minutes trying to think, but all that came to her clearly was the question, "What does it all mean? What does it all mean?" repeated over and over again. But she had a glimmering.

Then she remembered that Mr. Bosc was in the house doing her accounts. She sent for him. She could rely upon him, honest man.

By the time he arrived she had recovered her composure, and he only saw that she was looking unusually pale.

She waited until they were seated, then she opened deliberately.

"Mr. Bosc, does the Duke spend thousands a year upon me?"

"He spends a good deal," was the cautious reply.

"Thousands?" her tone insisted.

"It costs a good deal to keep up such an establishment as yours," Mr. Bosc fenced.

"I thought the lace paid for it all?"

Mr. Bosc was silent.

"Does the lace not pay for it all?"

The nervous twitching of Mr. Bosc's face was painful to see, but he did not speak. His eloquent silence answered her.

She shifted her ground. "Mr. Bosc, why does the Duke spend so much upon me?"

Mr. Bosc had often asked himself the question, and failed to find a satisfactory answer. He gave her the one he was sure of. "It was your whim to try this experiment," he said.

"Whim!" She clenched her hands. "Are you telling me that he considers my work here a mere whim?"

Again Mr. Bosc's eloquent silence answered her.

"But why? Why? Why?" she burst out passionately. "Why should he indulge a whim of mine?"

This was the crucial question. Mr. Bosc was obviously troubled.

"There is the Duchess," he said. "Don't forget the Duchess. Your patroness, you know. She favoured the experiment."

"But does the Duchess know that the experiment is a failure? That it does not pay? That the Duke lets it go on at great expense because it is a whim of mine?"

Mr. Bosc knew the answer to each of these questions, and the answer was No; but as the knowledge had come to him professionally he was in honour bound to consider it a professional secret. His face twitched, he crossed one long leg over the other, compressed his lips, and looked about the room. "You are asking me questions I cannot answer," he said at last. "Why do you ask them? What has occurred——?"

"Things have been said to me——"

Only things said to her. This was a relief. He waited, but that was all she could say. She sat with her eyes on him expectantly, putting the responsibility on him, appealing to him

as a man and a friend. He could not respond as a lawyer, a confidential agent; but as a man and a friend, and he was both, there was no honourable sacrifice he would not make for her—if only she would speak out. He thought of a way to help her, a leading question. "Do you suppose that the Duke has any ulterior motive?"

She baffled him with another question. "Do you suspect he has yourself?"

There was a long pause. "You place me in a difficult position," he said at last. "Believe me, I am your truest friend. But I can neither speak nor act on suspicion. Understand me. I am not saying that I suspect—er—anything. The fact that the Duke spends large sums on the upkeep of your establishment does not in itself give me just cause to suspect him of any ulterior motive. An interesting young woman of high character appeals to the best in a man—the chivalrous best. The pleasure of befriending her is cheap at any cost. If you have merely been disturbed by malicious tongues——" a gesture finished the phrase.

Had she merely been disturbed by malicious tongues? Ella asked herself. She was ready to believe it. She had affronted those dreadful women, she had previously affronted Mr. Harkles. That would account for their malice. Such enemies would resort to evil-speaking in revenge.

Mr. Bosc saw her countenance clear. "You are satisfied?" he asked. "At any rate, think it over, and tell me exactly. You were not prepared to speak out fully to-day, perhaps."

"Something was said to me in the showroom just now that greatly annoyed me," she answered. "I ought to have thought it over. I begin to feel that an enemy hath done this thing." She was able to smile. "When you come again, you shall hear all about it."

"Very good." He rose to go. "If you should want to see me sooner than on my regular day, send for me at any hour, day or night."

"You are a friend indeed!" she said.

She went out into the hall with him. The business of the day was over and there was no one about but Pecky Tim, just returned from an errand, and in exuberant spirits, as if the fresh air had gone to his head. He opened the door for Mr. Bosc, and slammed it after him. "Lidy!" he hailed her.

She was not too preoccupied to attend to Timothy. He came

sidling up to her eyeing her as he eyed a favourite morsel on his plate.

"I see your ole gent!" he cried jubilantly, sure that she would be glad to hear it.

"Which?" she asked, glancing mentally at some dozen "ole gents" who had been in the showroom that day.

"'Im as pays the piper and kissed you 'don't cry' as me aunt, Mrs. Pounce, ses you're 'is kep' lidy," Pecky rattled off in a breath.

He supposed that he was paying her an acceptable compliment and was chagrined by the effect of his speech, she was so obviously not at all pleased.

The machinery of a well-ordered household performs its office regardless of happenings that do not concern it. So long as the human parts of the machine are equal to the duties of their position they answer to expectation; the cook serves the meals she could not eat for sorrow, and her lady in like case sits down to them. Ella appeared punctually in the dining-room that evening as usual at the sound of the gong. She held her large establishment together by the ordered regularity of her own habits, and habit prevailed with an effort. Slackness on her part would set up a jar in the whole machine, failure would dislocate it. She had even changed her dress, as usual, the airy lace of the afternoon for heavier black. To that extent she made a difference. Her dowdiest, most unbecoming dress was the only wear in the state of her mind, the nearest approach she could make to tearing her hair, putting dust on her head, and sitting in sackcloth and ashes. She would have made herself an offence to the eye if she could, and she had done her best, which was some satisfaction. When he came he should see—— And he would come, of course. What else had he returned to town for? "My dearest!" Oh, the fool she had been! Up to the last moment too. She was sure of it. Mr. Bosc did suspect him. It was all so obvious now that her eyes were open. His delicate approaches. He was delicate—this to his credit with a pang. The remembrance of all that had made him dear to her was upon her with the word, inflicting the cruellest sense of loss. It was worse than death, which would not have robbed her of the precious possession of tender recollections. No such solace remained to her. All his kindnesses were dishonoured by the motive. To remember was to despise him.

Would he come! But he must come. With a stamp of her foot she insisted. She must get it over.

She could settle to nothing. Awhile she stood looking out at the dreary street, her thoughts a chaotic jumble.

the wan day
Went glooming down in wet and weariness,

came aptly, and:

This madness is come on us for our sins.

Whose sins! Words of her grandmother's, implanted in her mind on she knew not what occasion, answered the question: "In sin and shame you Brabants rose to power; in sin and shame your family shall become extinct." To whom were the terrible words addressed! Or were they ever spoken! She might have dreamed them. Why should her grandmother hate the Brabants! . . . She wandered upstairs to her bedroom, and stood long looking into the lovely eyes of the portrait she cherished. "I wish I could hear you speak," she said.

But he might come at any moment, she had better go down. Only once had she not been on the spot to meet him—that terrible night! The recollection of how he had tended her *that terrible night*, his tenderness, his patience, overcame her. Surely, surely he was good—goodness itself. They had slandered him, and she had been weakly—criminally—credulous. If no such thought had crossed his mind, and she accused him——! Horrible! Besides, what had she to accuse him of! Of being slandered. But she had been slandered herself. Why should not he be as innocent as she! Because—— The tide of thought turned on itself, and the two currents, meeting, clashed furiously. Out of the turmoil arose hateful suggestions of restrained lovemaking, of words with a double meaning, of tentative demonstrations of affection, veiled passion hiding its time. She was not to be bought, but she might be won. He had that grace of manhood in him, she was sure, that a woman he could buy would not be to his taste at all.

But she must go down to be ready if he came—to be ready for what might happen. She had nothing arranged to say or to do, but the intensity of her feelings made it impossible to suppose that their next interview would not be decisive, some-

how. There was his sudden return after taking a long leave of her to be explained. . . .

How should she greet him? Not as usual, that was impossible. Yet, if he were not guilty, how should she explain her sudden coldness without betraying the horror she had had in her mind? Chance favoured her. When she went down he had just entered and was in the hall speaking to Beveridge, in whose presence greetings were bound to be formal.

"Excuse me a minute," he said. "Something to say to Beveridge."

He followed her to the sitting-room presently. She awaited him standing, her heart thumping painfully. He stopped in the doorway to look at her.

"Study in black and white," he commented. "Why this sable, dearest? Mourning in my absence, eh? Didn't expect me back so soon, eh? How white you are! Overtired yourself to-day. Mustn't overtire yourself. Here, sit down."

He placed a chair for her, and she gladly dropped into it. Somehow she had expected him to be different in appearance and manner as her suspicions made him different in character, and here he was just the same; genial, abrupt, kindly, courteous, offhandedly affectionate, not in the least loverlike. How absurd of her, how *wicked* to have doubted him! Now that they were face to face and he just as he had always been—— But was he? No, he was not. He was trying to be. And, even as she thought it, he gave up the attempt. His geniality was gone. He showed indecision in the choice of a chair. Sitting at last opposite to her he had obviously something serious to say, and as obviously hesitated.

"Well, here I am," he began, and looked at her for help.

"Why have you come?" she responded. She knew that it all turned upon that. His answer would resolve her doubts for better or worse.

"To see you."

Then it was true. Hope and faith died of the blow, a violent death.

"To see you," he repeated. "Something I have to tell you. Long wanted to. Had my doubts. Must make a change in our relations. Might not be for the better. Strangworth never agreed. Don't want to lose your respect, my dear. Know what you have in your blood. And your grandmother. Peasant rectitude, peasant hardness, peasant narrowness. Sticklers for

form. Legal forms. The letter, not the spirit. See her in you, often. Strangworth always would have it I was mistaken. Claimed to know you better than I did. Offered me proof. Just been to see me. Came to Castlefield at great inconvenience to himself. Dear fellow, Strangworth. Came to encourage me——"

"To encourage you!" she gasped. Mr. Strangworth not on the side of the angels—this was staggering. She sat rigid, trying to think of something to say to end this dreadful moment, but her mind would not obey her will. As with all of us at tense moments, trifles claimed her attention. His tiepin. It was the one he wore the first time he came to see her, a gold fox's head with ruby eyes. She had not seen it since, but she remembered it, and she also remembered that she seemed to remember it then, and had said so, and the Duke, as though startled, had covered the pin with his hand, and changed countenance curiously. He felt her eyes on it, and, as often in their happy intercourse,

Thought leapt out to wed with thought
Ere thought could wed itself with speech.

He put his hand up to it.

"I wondered that you should remember," he said. "The small thing that you were. In your grandmother's arms. You snatched at it, and I gave it to you, but she would not let you keep it. You were such a beautiful child, Ella. I tried to persuade her to give you to me, to have you brought up——"

"You tried to buy me, I suppose," Ella flashed out scornfully.

"Ella, is that a proper way to speak to me!"

He was ducal now, but it is no use being ducal with an angry woman. She sprang to her feet.

"Ella, you don't understand," he expostulated, rising slowly.

"But I do understand," she interrupted passionately. "I know why you have done so much for me. I was told explicitly. You have put me in a hateful position."

He supposed that Strangworth had told her.

"If I have it was an error of judgment," he answered, speaking quietly. "Strangworth could think of nothing better, and he is a man of the world. Of both worlds. Tolerant. Understands a man's temptations. Forgives a lapse. It is not such

an uncommon position, mine and yours. I thought I had won your love."

She stood there, her hands clenched at her sides, hard, cold, resentful. "I did love you," she said, in an intense low tone. "I loved you with the purest affection, because I esteemed you above every man on earth. How can I esteem you now?"

He sighed and stood there a little, his eyes on the ground, considering. "Try to understand what this means to me," he said at last. "I know the poisonous prejudice that was instilled into your mind as a child. It is that which is making you inhuman now. I allow for it. Rigid principles, deep-rooted animosity against my whole class. Naturally you judge me harshly. Make me pay, eh? You are not thinking of me as a human being at all. Try to realise that I am a man, Ella, that my errors were the errors of a man, of a man in the grip of circumstances—— I am not excusing myself."

He might have. He had in his mind his futile efforts to find companionship in his wife's society, long persevered in and still surviving in his daily devotion when they were under the same roof, the half-hour's morning visit never omitted, from which he came empty away save for the sense of relief which rewards a duty done. But he was too great a gentleman to set up such a defence.

"I am not accusing myself either," he went on. "I am only a man. And there is a kind of love against which no man is proof if it attacks him—— No," he corrected himself. "I won't say no man. I speak for myself alone. And considering what you are to me, considering our relative positions——"

"You mean the difference between your Grace and a common workgirl," she broke in contemptuously.

"You know that I do not mean that."

He spoke severely, he looked at her severely. Never before had he spoken to her in anger. Awhile ago look and tone would have cut her to the heart. Now they stung her pride.

"Your attitude is perverse," he went on. "I cannot think that you will persist in it. I have a claim on your love. I am not a man to shirk responsibility. I have done my best to make a life for you worth living——"

"For your own pleasure," she struck in.

"True. For my own pleasure," he repeated hotly. "Your happiness is mine. My only happiness," he added in a softened

tone. "My one joy in life. I am prouder of you, Ella, than of all my other possessions put together."

"I am not a possession of yours," she burst out superbly.

He looked at her, admiring the pose, smiling as he might have smiled at the impotent rage of a child, reflecting.

"Legally, no," he answered at last deliberately. "That is the devil of it. But we should be all the dearer to each other for that. Our common misfortune. If I could set you on a throne, Ella, and claim you for my own before the whole world, I would. As it is——"

He walked away from her, and stood with his back to her, nervously shuffling some music that lay on the piano. There was dignity in his attitude, that was habitual, but there was pathos too. Had he been young and gallant and handsome instead of elderly and commonplace in appearance, she would have hated him. As it was, some comprehension of what he was feeling came over her, caused her a qualm. In the reaction she was sorry for him.

When he returned to her she looked at him miserably. He was quick to interpret the change of expression.

"You do love me, Ella," he said. "Your pride is up in arms now against the position. Sad and sore am I about it too. Always have been. But what can I do, my dearest? Take it that life is worth having at any rate, especially a life like yours, the life of a beautiful gifted woman, dearly beloved, greatly respected. The one miserable flaw should not detract from the value of such a life. Be reasonable. If only Strangworth had been here to talk to you! My talking does no good. I shall leave you to think. Better still, to feel. Presently, you will feel. You will feel for me. Till then——"

In his abrupt way, with a gesture of farewell, he turned to go. A moment he lingered by the door, giving her a chance to speak, and she could not. She was too shaken.

He was gone. The door was shut upon him—nevermore to open. That was a strange, harrowing thought.

Standing there she recovered slowly, came back to herself. Impressions like storm-driven clouds scudding across the sky succeeded each other. She was conscious first of all of sounds all about her, noises of the night floating in through the open window; voices, the pattering of feet, the clatter of vehicles, the striking of clocks, and music that was not musical. Of late

she had apprehended only actual values—bells rang and they were but bells ringing for church, for callers, for the time of day. Once these noises of the night were the tuneful voice of the City Joyous of her dreams singing a song of life, a morning song of joy and hope. Now all abroad were growlings of cruel beasts torturing their hapless victims, and cries and groans and unavailing tears. And gladness, too, as hateful; the gladness of hard hearts, callously indifferent.

The noises of the night combined, resolved themselves into a crashing chord. What was it, the dominant note of that giant chord? What was it that always prevailed? Underlying pleasure, latent in happiness, mixed largely in noisy mirth, waxing, waning, but never absent; not insistent because the ear was accustomed to it; not specially considered except at odd moments and when it drew near. . . . It was upon her now, an invading something, an influence, not physical at this moment—worse. It affected her mind; she was conscious of mental suffering. It wrung her heart. Whence this—this pain?—Pain, of course! In herself, all about her, everywhere, there it was—pain! Incessant, awful, needless pain. Not inevitable but inflicted. The poor were made to pay in pain for the pleasures of the rich. She saw the poor, her people, suffering in her person, to whom degradation had been offered as a compliment.

Those who are born to suffer with their suffering kind are happy compared to those who are born to realise what their kind are suffering. For these last, though they win every prize in life, there is never an end to pain. Compassion is a scourge forever lashing the compassionate. Love should come of compassion, but sometimes it sets up hate. When love comes of compassion there is balm in the heart; hate has no solace. Ella had never admitted the power of love to redeem. She was for fighting for the wronged, for punishing oppressors, for stamping them out. These rich and powerful people—she saw them now as scum on a stagnant pool, corrupting the air with poisonous exhalations. She hated them for the evil they did, for the good they did not do, for the suffering they caused, for the pain they never relieved. She had no conception of them as themselves victims of their age and of a system, nor of Society as a corporate mass bearing on the individual. She made no allowance for adverse circumstances, for custom, for the pressure of hereditary pre-

disposition, for the unarmed state of those who have not been educated to do as they would be done by. Herself a rare one, strong to resist massed tendencies when they were evil, and even to move the mass by her will, she had small comprehension of and no patience with any attitude but her own. High-handed by heredity, militant and vengeful by education, the habit of her mind prevailed. She had nothing to be grateful for, on the contrary, she had everything to resent. It came as naturally to her to retaliate as it came to Christ to forgive. But she did not forget her workers. They should not suffer. They should benefit!

She sat down to write. Her hand was steady. The little note, beautifully written in her small, clear, curious writing, every letter perfect, the whole peculiarly spaced, was as deliberately artistic as any she ever penned. She addressed it to "The Most Hon. the Marquis of Melton," and posted it herself.

CHAPTER IX

"HELL!" SAID LORD TERRY DE BEACH

O that men should put an enemy in their mouths, to steal away their brains.—SHAKESPEARE.

1

IT was true of Lord Terry de Beach, that he was of an affectionate disposition. His heart-strings were less elastic than his principles; once attached he was fast bound by them. Unfortunately, because of the elasticity of his principles, his attachments were fortuitous, which accounts for the undesirableness of some of them, the unexpectedness of others. There was Mr. Harkles, for instance. His liking was out of all proportion to his respect for that gentleman. In banishing Mr. Harkles he was punishing himself. There was no one else with whom he'd the heart to be gay, no one else on whom he cared to exercise his peculiar sense of humour to the same extent, or so successfully. The longer his Julius's exile lasted the more he missed him, and the less importance he attached to the cork jacket incident. What was it after all but an error of judgment? And as to the *Iphigenia* scandal—— Why!

there were other eyes and tongues upon the yacht. A hint from one of his men to the lady's maids might have done the trick. The wrong dog has been whipped before now. And since the Club had barred him, Mr. Harkles had acted like a man misjudged. Gad! You would think it was he who was barring the Club, the way he came and went, ignorin' 'em all! That might be shamelessness, also it might be good conscience. Lord Terry preferred to think it was, and what a man prefers to think he ends by believing. He wished he'd discussed the whole business thoroughly with his Julius. He'd been a cursed fool to give him away on suspicion. He'd forgotten how he came to do it exactly. There might have been whisky in it. Harkles should have come and had it out with him.

It may be remarked that Mr. Harkles knew better. To have attempted to have it out with Lord Terry at the time would have been asking for the lash. And he was pretty sure that the Terrier would find himself at a loss without him, sooner or later. The thing was to wait till he was wanted and then to step in on some plausible pretext which would give the Terrier an excuse to let bygones be bygones. In the meantime Mr. Harkles was for giving him a fright. He would show himself indifferent to his patronage. The old man was contrary. Once he got it into his head that his Julius was content to have done with him for good, he would never rest till he had him reinstated. Putting two-and-two together, Mr. Harkles was satisfied that they made four, and acted accordingly.

The crisis of the Terrier's desolation came upon him suddenly one evening. He was in his museum of a dressing-room dressed for dinner, all but his coat, instead of which he wore one of his favourite *sang-de-bœuf* robes with a turban to match. He was at a loose end, that was why he had not finished dressing —couldn't make up his mind what to do with himself when he was dressed. Dining at home alone was beastly dull; there were only bores at the Club; and a restaurant, unless you were entertainin' someone, was disgustin'. He couldn't think of anybody it would be worth while to ask at the last moment even if it would be of any use. Nobody but a blasted bore would be disengaged at that time of night, and they were all blasted bores anyway. In the underside of his thoughts was Harkles as not a blasted bore, but he kept down the suggestion.

A servant bringing in a letter roused him and did him good by giving him someone to swear at. The letter itself, being a friendly letter from a woman he admired and respected, was a panacea for his despondency. Lady Janet "hardly liked to bother him, but she did want his advice, if she might have a talk with him." It was about a little project of hers, in which she hoped he might be interested. Now that was damned flatterin'! Janet Brastaby was of the Great Lady breed, not the sort of woman who'd go askin' advice of Jack, Bill, Tom, or Harry. Fastidious. Clever too. Knew whom to choose for an adviser. Man of the world. Hello! What's this? *"Man of both worlds."*

Lord Terry dropped the note. The machinery of his mind did a record review of many happenings, in which bottles and Bibles played equally prominent parts. Out of the whole emerged a portrait of himself on his knees. He looked up at the wall opposite, on which was hanging a picture he wouldn't have liked a woman of the Great Lady breed to see. He rose stiffly, mounted a chair, took down the picture, and cast it into a cupboard. Then he sat down at his writing-table, and read the note again with mental comments. Dine with her *tête-à-tête*. Very pleasant. Date suited him perfectly. Would make it suit if it didn't. Delighted to do anythin' to oblige you, my dear Lady Janet. As he dipped his pen in the ink his eye lighted on a large photograph of Lady Cruxhaven, framed in silver, which stood on his writing-table. "Disgustin' woman," he apostrophised her. Seizing the picture with shaky hands, he broke it up and threw the fragments, frame and all, into the waste-paper basket. Having thus symbolically put away evil, he felt worthy to approach Lady Janet on paper. Having penned his reply with pleasure he found himself so enlivened that he was for celebrating the event. It was at this happy moment, while the sun was shining, that Mr. Harkles sent up his card.

"Mr. Harkles, my lord," said the servant, presenting the card on a salver.

Lord Terry glanced expectantly at the door, but Mr. Harkles was not there to follow on the heels of the announcement. He was not going to force himself in.

"Confound him, where is he?" Lord Terry exclaimed.

"In the 'all, my lord, awaitin' your lordship's pleasure to see 'im on a matter of bis'ness or not, accordin' to your

lordship's convenience," was Powdered Head's succinct reply.

"Damn fool! Show him up," said Lord Terry, as pleasant as you please.

But he was careful to erase any sign of pleasure from his reception of Mr. Harkles. On his feet, leaning against his writing-table, he awaited the exile's return, inwardly smiling, outwardly morose. It was for Harkles to do the kowtow, you know. But again Harkles knew better. He returned as faithful hound if you like, not as whipped cur crouching to your feet. He had a duty to perform not a favour to ask, a duty he owed to Society, and that done, he would be off again—unless you were tactful and somehow managed to grapple him to your soul with hooks of steel. You could see by the dust coat he had kept on over his evening dress, and the crush hat he held under his arm, that he intended to be brief. Lord Terry saw all this, but he saw something else as well. He saw a sign of disorder. One glove was not buttoned. Such a symptom of preoccupation was portentous. Whatever pretext his Julius had invented for this interview, he was for making it a casting of the die.

Mr. Harkles at the door bowed formally. Lord Terry de Beach at the writing-table bowed formally.

"You are surprised to see me," Mr. Harkles began.

"Not at all. I was expectin' you," Lord Terry promptly contradicted.

Mr. Harkles allowed for the force of habit—Harkles was wary. But contradiction might mean the re-establishment of friendly relations on the usual terms—Harkles was hopeful.

"My excuse for the intrusion—my reason, I should say," he proceeded, "seems sufficient to me, or you may be sure that I should not have come. I do not come on my own account——"

"Come to the point, man," Lord Terry interrupted.

"The point is the Corner House," Mr. Harkles aimed, and stopped short.

Encouraged by an inquiring eye he fired and hit. "Melton has become intimate there in his father's absence."

"Hell!" said Lord Terry de Beach.

This was his vivid first impression.

There was a tense silence, then Lord Terry said civilly: "Sit down, if you please."

Mr. Harkles sat down.

Lord Terry went to the table on which the Duke had carved his name, and looked at the straggling letters. "Poor old Ninny," he reflected.

Recollection traverses vast tracks of the past at a bound. The Terrier saw himself a big, strong chap at school fighting for a stolid little chap, called "Gracie," because he was a duke, and set upon for the same reason. He got his own name of Terrier for his pugnacity. And, by the Lord Harry, he was pugnacious still! He'd fight the devil for a friend. And he was not a mere bludgeoner, limited to the choice of a weapon. He had tactics at command. Here was a crisis in Ninny's affairs which required diplomatic handlin'. The suggestion was a thunderin' nasty one. Whether there was anythin' in it or not, this fellow Harkles must be squared to stop the talk. Squarin' Harkles was simple.

He kicked off his Turkish slippers, laid aside his robe and turban, rang for his valet, and finished dressing without a word to Mr. Harkles until he was ready, and then it was a word of command in disguise: "We'll go and dine somewhere and thrash this business out, my Julius," he said.

Mr. Harkles had been kept in misery by these proceedings. He sat in suspense, completely at a loss. When the Terrier was civil the Terrier was wont to be dangerous, but heretofore it had always been a word and a blow, and the Terrier had not struck. Mr. Harkles buttoned his glove. He had with difficulty persuaded himself to that point of disorder, but it was necessary to indicate perturbation of mind in order to show that something serious was amiss. In that he seemed to have succeeded, but what was to be the result? Reward or punishment? The olive branch or something "with boiling oil" in it? There were symptoms of boiling oil, but "my Julius" proclaimed a reprieve. If Mr. Harkles had ever suffered from a sense of sin he would have thought of himself as suddenly relieved of the burden.

He followed his patron into the street.

"I'll take your arm, Harkles," said Lord Terry de Beach.

So it came to pass that Mr. Harkles was again to be seen in Piccadilly supporting the noble gentleman. The "squarin'" was being thoroughly done.

"Pleasure first," said Lord Terry de Beach when they sat down to dine.

Space to protect the exclusive from vulgar ears was provided for money and position in the restaurant to which he had brought Mr. Harkles, but vulgar eyes were permitted to feast on exclusiveness in the distance, so Harkles was humoured and conversation could be intimate.

Happy Harkles laid himself out to please, and soon he had the Terrier swearing at him quite naturally. The gulf thus bridged, they were back in their best times together. The Terrier's heart warmed to his Julius. What a fool he had been to cut himself off from him! Rank outsider, of course, but a most amusin' chap. "Amusin'" to begin with, but "not a bad chap" later on. He would have been "a good chap" finally if the penultimate bottle of wine had not been corked. Suffering all round ensued on this shame, and the Terrier remembered.

"By the way," he snarled, "where'd y' get that damned lie you told me just now, Mr. Harkles?"

"Which?" said Harkles, off his guard.

The arrival of a fresh bottle under escort of the principal officials of the establishment imposed restraint on Lord Terry de Beach's mirth. His lordship had the goodness to test the new bottle at the request of anxious officials and pronounced it excellent. It was evident that his lordship's good-humour was restored, and anxious officials withdrew, relieved.

Harkles, with gloom on his brow, had waited for this to repair his error. "I told you no lie, sir," he protested, on his dignity.

Ninny's interests were uppermost again in the Terrier's mind by this time. He remembered that the "thunderin' nasty suggestion" was to be combated diplomatically, and dropped the bludgeon. Harkles must be mollified.

"I was alludin' to what you were sayin' about old Lady Fat and Fast—what's her name?" he explained. "Too good to be true, my Julius. I suspect an effort of your own creative genius, on which I compliment you, y' understand."

Mr. Harkles understood perfectly, yet decided to be mollified.

The Terrier seemed to seek a new subject.

"By the way," he recommenced, "what was that yarn you were tellin' me about the Corner House?"

"Oh, that," said Mr. Harkles. "Well, that story, sir, was not an effort of my creative genius. It came to me accidentally from a reliable source. A person called Pounce is em-

ployed at my flat now, who was housekeeper at the Corner House for a time, but left because she couldn't stand the 'goin's on' as she expressed it. Her nephew is page-boy there. She's one of those confounded women who will talk, there's no stopping her. She let fall the detail I mentioned, obviously without attaching any importance to it."

"H'm," grunted Lord Terry de Beach. "Then why do you attach importance to it, my Julius?"

"For the same reason that you do, sir." Mr. Harkles had him.

"I supposed so," said the Terrier, after a moment's reflection. "Y' see, as I do, that the Corner House is bein' slandered by enemies of the Brabants, and it's confoundedly hard on the Duke—just when he's made dukes popular too, raised their standin', justified their existence in this democratic age by doin' somethin' useful, somethin' for the good of the community at large. If only he'd had a useful Duchess the two together might have changed the world. But, a man of the world yourself, y' know how the world rewards its benefactors. Now, my Julius, here we are, you and me, friends of the Duke. I don't say he's never tripped in his life, but I do say, and I always have said, as you know, that the Corner House isn't the way he'd do things. And what we've got to do, you and me, is to clear him of that."

"I see, sir," said Harkles. "I'll do anything in my humble power to oblige you."

Lord Terry eyed him meditatively. "The devil of it is *what* to do," he said. "Contradictin' slanderers doesn't shut 'em up."

"Such an establishment as the Corner House is unusual," Harkles ventured.

"But, damn it, sir, there's no mystery about it," Lord Terry was down on him. "The object was publicly proclaimed and has been conscientiously pursued ever since. The girl has done, is doin', and means to do, a good work."

"At an extravagant cost, and the Duchess is stingy," said Mr. Harkles.

"You mean to say that the Duke pays. Why not? It's a fleabite out of his income. My own Settlement costs as much, I dare say, and nobody says a word about it."

"You're not running your Settlement to please an extraordinarily beautiful, gifted, highly-educated young woman from nowhere," Mr. Harkles reminded him. "If *I* were in a posi-

tion to have it out with the Duke, I'd have it out with him. *And lose no time about it.*"

He looked hard at Lord Terry de Beach, and Lord Terry de Beach understood him.

"Where the devil is he?" he said. "Find out for me, Harkles, like a good chap. I'll have to pin him down to a meetin', or I'll be chasin' him all over the country for the next month."

He rose from the table, and shook out his trousers. Harkles was squared, but he must be kept tight hold of. And there was the night to put in anyway. Concern for Ninny had not spoilt his friends' appetites. Both gentlemen, in fact, had dined exceedingly well, and now that business was disposed of, they found themselves in the pleasurable state of "begone, dull care!" Why not do something? For the next few days they were doing things which had better not be recorded, and the time was lost to the business which Lord Terry de Beach had set out to do.

2

The Terrier had lost all sense of urgency in that matter of the Corner House when next he was able to consider it. He remembered that Janet Brastaby and Strangworth had always scouted the notion of that girl bein' anythin' but as straight as they make 'em, and you might take anythin' as proved that Janet Brastaby and Strangworth vouched for. If the girl herself were all right, what could be wrong? Melton might be goin' to the house like other young men, but Melton wasn't a dangerous character; too much the other way for the Terrier's taste. Both those Brabant boys were milksops; that was their mother comin' out in 'em. Neither of 'em had ever been in a scrape in his life. Smart women called 'em "The dull Brabants," because of their unnaturally good conduct. He flattered himself that he knew his Julius. That suggestion of trouble brewin' for Ninny was just a clever ruse to curry favour again. As such, he excused, even admired it. His Julius always had somethin' on to liven you up and he was glad to have him back on any plausible pretext. The ruse having answered his Julius's purpose, and at the same time changed the winter of his own discontent into the glorious summer of prospective celebrations, he was for tactfully dropping the subject. But Mr. Harkles would not have it so. To be re-

instated in the Terrier's good graces was not enough for him. Until the Terrier countenanced him as of yore, in public as well as in private, his purpose would be only half achieved. Taking his arm in Piccadilly after dark was nothing but a trick to secure his congenial company for a frolic. What Mr. Harkles designed was reinstatement in the good graces of the Land and Leisure Club, no less. Lord Terry de Beach, in a temper, had made the Club too hot to be healthy for Mr. Harkles. He had it in his power to bring the temperature down to normal if only he could be induced to display his personal reaction on the spot. For this purpose they must be seen together at the Club; that was the next step. The difficulty was to induce Lord Terry de Beach to show himself there with the discredited Harkles. His liking for his Julius's good company would not be inducement enough so long as he could enjoy it *sub rosa*. Mr. Harkles's only hope at present was in that threat of trouble brewing for the Duke. Convince him that danger threatened his friend, and the loyal old reprobate would stop at nothing to avert it.

Lord Terry took twenty-four hours to recover from the first effect of his Julius's return. When he was well enough he made ready for the next celebration. A reperusal of Lady Janet's stimulating invitation reminded him of an event which had yet to be celebrated.

Mr. Harkles, released from duty, went off to hunt up news of the Duke's whereabouts, but returned to dinner. It was during his absence that the Terrier made up his mind to treat the alarm as a ruse that had answered its purpose and was done with, but Mr. Harkles revived the subject, which made the Terrier suspicious. "Why are you makin' it your business, Harkles?" he asked shrewdly.

"The Duke has always been civil to me," said Harkles Superior, a man who never forgot a kindness.

"As civil as he'd be to a clothes prop, which you don't kick out of your way but steer clear of when you come across it, because it has a right to be there," said the Terrier affably.

Such a compliment from him was a tribute of affection, and Mr. Harkles felt reassured; but he went stolidly on with his dinner in silence, until the Terrier could stand it no longer.

"I didn't mean to shut you up," he said pacifically.

Mr. Harkles indicated a sense of injury by slightly shrugging his shoulders.

"If you've anythin' more to say, I'm listenin'," the Terrier gave in at last. "You tell me Melton's goin' to the Corner House. Well, what's the harm of that? The girl is respectable."

"That is the danger," Mr. Harkles answered impressively. "If the girl were not respectable there would be no question of his marrying her."

"Marryin' her!" the Terrier exploded. "Is that what you're drivin' at?"

"What else, if the girl is respectable," Mr. Harkles replied, looking hard at him. "And even if she is not——"

In the whirl of thought, of suppressed doubts, suspicions, forecasts, let loose by the shock of the suggestion, a moment of illumination was vouchsafed to the Terrier's loyal old heart. His eyes were set in a frozen stare on the three servants drawn up in a row, stiff as wooden figures, with their backs to the sideboard at the far end of the room, but he did not see them. He saw Melton and his father and Ella Banks, hand in hand, the Duke the centre of the group, and seeing them so, suddenly, for the first time, something struck him, something even worse than what Harkles had in his mind, something that caused him to gasp.

"If what the gossips take for granted is true, sir, there are tragic possibilities in the case," Mr. Harkles was saying significantly.

Lord Terry's face went white, but his voice was controlled. "You were to find me the Duke's address," he said, as though by the way. "Where is he?"

"You are ill, sir, some brandy——" Harkles exclaimed, half rising.

"I asked you a question, Mr. Harkles," said Lord Terry de Beach.

Mr. Harkles crouched to the whip. "I beg your pardon," he answered, subsiding. "The Duke's address—oh yes! Colonel Kedlock is in town. That is the result of my careful inquiries. I've done my best." This was said with the air of an ill-appreciated man. "It was no use *my* asking Kedlock, but of course he would tell you. You could look him up at the Club."

The Terrier signalled for brandy, sipped a glass neat, and recovered his composure. In the interval he got it off by heart that here was an imbroglio that could only be set straight by the most delicate handling.

of noting several members observing him thus powerfully sponsored. That his friends should leave him without a word, stranded in the hall alone, he flattered himself must look like an understood arrangement between persons too intimate to stand upon ceremony with each other.

They retired to one of the smaller rooms, a dark, damp den, furnished with a writing-table up against the wall, and in the open space two stands on which were the inevitable aids to smokers, a large leather-covered armchair, and a narrow, hard, high-backed settee, on which it was only possible to sit upright. Members with private matters to discuss used this room, and there was a tacit understanding that two, so engaged, should not be intruded upon. Steel-engraved portraits of Queen Victoria and her Consort complacently countenanced all that went on there.

Colonel Kedlock, tall, lean, withered, but distinguished-looking (when they were seen together, strangers invariably supposed that he was the Duke), took possession of the easy-chair, leaving Lord Terry perforce to make himself as comfortable as he might on the hard, cane-bottomed, high-backed settee. But his anxiety argued for self-restraint, and tended to keep him physically upright. Lucy was to be managed without being fully informed. He must get Ninny's address out of him without giving any particular reason for wanting it, no easy matter, for Lucy was apt to be bemused at that time of day and difficult to handle. The Terrier ordered whisky-and-soda and cigars the first thing, as having a necessary part to play in the management. He didn't mean to take more than a peg himself, but he'd be the better for one. The thought of what might be hanging over Ninny was worse than physical pain; and there was no being tactful in such a state of depression. He knew what he'd got to do, he'd got to find Ninny and warn him. He'd do better without the sense of dull care upon him.

A merry heart goes all the day,
Your sad tires in a mile—a.

That was the devil of it, he reflected, and proceeded to drown dull care as part of the business in hand. He was a man of broad contrasts, glooms, and gleams; not for finessing but for active service. Could he have booted and spurred and ridden to the rescue full tilt, as his gallant ancestors had ridden on

"Lucy Kedlock, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "Delightful fellow, Lucy (Lucian, you know), with a weakness——"

Unconsciously he indicated Colonel Kedlock's weakness by touching his glass to have it refilled. The habit of drowning dull care once formed is tyrannical. In this moment of extreme anxiety he was suffering acutely on Ninny's account, and he must have a drop more—"just to clear his head." The plea implied a sense of danger in the drop, or he would not have been by way of excusing it, but tyrannical habit prevailed.

He sipped and thought—thought of his school-days, when he and Ninny and Lucy (Lucian, you know) were chums. They had kept in touch all their lives, though their careers had been widely divergent. The Duke had plodded on steadily, content to be just a good Duke until lately, when, suddenly, he had burst out as a social reformer. The Terrier had been a rake with a sense of responsibility, which had made him a good soldier in his time, and always a careful custodian as tenant for life of the vast property which he held himself in honour bound to pass on intact to posterity. Lucian Kedlock, also a large landowner by birth, but untrammelled with an honourable sense of duty to posterity, had dissipated his whole patrimony before he was thirty, and would have gone under completely but for the Duke, who had sheltered him under his own roof, weaned him from bad associates, made him work, and set him up in the lucrative post of Land Agent on his Castlefield Saye estates, in which position Colonel Kedlock's conduct of affairs had been exemplary.

"At the Club, did you say?" the Terrier asked presently. "I'll go and look him up."

"I'll accompany you," Harkles ventured, in hope and fear.

His patron raised no objection. Mr. Harkles counted no more to him at the moment than a dog he was accustomed to have at his heels, and like a dog Mr. Harkles fawned on him.

Colonel Kedlock was just getting out of a hansom when they reached the Club, and it was "The Terrier, dear old boy!" and "Lucy, I'm glad to see you!" and a long affectionate handshake. Harkles, waiting, came in for the aftermath of Colonel Kedlock's cordiality, a more perfunctory handshake, but accompanied by the acceptable tribute: "And Harkles too, not looking a day older, on my word!"

They ascended the steps together and Harkles, having adroitly insinuated himself between them, had the gratification

of noting several members observing him thus powerfully sponsored. That his friends should leave him without a word, stranded in the hall alone, he flattered himself must look like an understood arrangement between persons too intimate to stand upon ceremony with each other.

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many a forlorn hope, dull care would never have attacked him. But the torpid civilisation of the nineteenth century curbed the hereditary impulse which, in his case, would have resulted in a display of archaic activity. The desire to be up and doing raged in him, and the conventions of the day raged at him, threatening him with the ribald laughter of the day. It might be tilting at a windmill, it might be questing a mare's-nest. He'd best go easy. But energy without an outlet sets up an ache which going easy does not relieve, and the nineteenth century was not for turning energy to account but for drugging it. Enterprise was out of date, and apathy more common than the courage to take risks. In the whisky bottle was the antidote to the Terrier's archaic chivalrous activity. He poured the antidote out, drank, and was comforted by the enemy with the recollection of "more haste, less speed."

Colonel Kedlock was one of the conservative breed that walks backwards with its eyes on the past. He never lost sight of the past, his own past, in which he had much to regret. He could have cured himself of regret by turning his back on the past and going forward boldly on a new tack; but it was not in him even to look forward. With his eyes on the regrettable past he stood still, suffering, and in suffering he seized upon the fatal antidote, but without altering his point of view. In his case whisky had to relieve regret, and it did, by making it a mournful pleasure to regret.

The Terrier, waiting an opportunity, encouraged him to chat. Lucy was the devil of a fellow for a chat. He'd got off now on the subject of himself as a disappointed man, pursued by ill-luck. Even his daughter Lena, only child, had disappointed him in every way. Ran away with Eustace Brabant, a younger son, when she might have married a mediatized prince, man of great wealth and the highest possible character. And now, what d'ye think? As it turned out, she would never have a living child, and there was only Melton between Eustace and the Dukedom, and Melton might never marry, or might never have a child. Just think what it would mean to Ninny if he should live to see himself without an heir!—A little more whisky brought him to the point of believing that this catastrophe was inevitable, and the Terrier was seeing it so too. Colonel Kedlock got out his pocket-handkerchief and mourned pathetically that he might have been father to a dukedom, but protested generously that he would have resigned that dis-

tinction to save the dukedom from its doom. The old Terrier could sympathise with his feelings as a father and a friend.

The old Terrier, fancying that he could, found the position harrowing, and also made play with his pocket-handkerchief. At the same time he remembered that there was something to be done delicately. The subject of Lucy's long intercourse had confused his mind with regard to the thing that was to be done, but it was quite clear to him that Ninny must be told.

"Came up to town on purpose to shympathise with—ith daughter," Colonel Kedlock was saying. "Result of an accident. Not her fault, poor girl, only child, my Lena——"

"Charmin' girl," the Terrier interjected mechanically. "Tell you what it is, Lucy," he added emphatically, "Ninny must be told. A word of warnin' at once—*at once*—would straighten things out. Such a business happenin' in a ducal family would be a damned serious business. Ninny must be warned at once. D'ye follow me, Lucy? I'm for bein' off to warn him myself by the nexsht train.

"By the way, where is he?" he broke off to ask, making elaborate play with a cigar that had gone out and a siphon that was empty, to distract Lucy's attention from the importance of the question. How was that for delicate *finesse?*

But Colonel Kedlock instinctively resisted the attempt to pump him. "You ask me where he is?" he said, glaring at the Terrier. "Lettersh will be forwarded."

"Under circumstances so urgent——" the Terrier began to reason.

"Dukesh's orders," Colonel Kedlock interrupted. "Circumstanshes make no diff-diffrench. Address, no. Lettersh fordid. You *she*—you *she*," he tried to explain apologetically, but the emphasis unfortunately suggested to the Terrier that he was being called a "she," which was inshultin', and he wouldn't stand it.

"Whatsh Kedlock?" he demanded contemptuously. "Kedlocksh a weed. Kedlock on land ruinsh land."

His tone drew a bellicose retort from the Colonel, a squall ensued, and epithets like feathers at a cock fight clouded the atmosphere; but the squall ended inconsequently, as it had begun, each giving the other the credit of being in a state for which allowances should be made on a jovial occasion. As boys they had made peace with an exchange of marbles and penknives after a flare-up, now they exchanged compliments.

man who could stick it out alone like that must have something to go upon, and they'd like to hear what he had to say for himself. They'd have done the same, though, as he was doing. Had they been wrongfully accused they wouldn't have defended themselves either.

A group of Youngsters, among whom were Ballard and Sarb and Callowabbey, with their satellites Filmer Dabbs, junior, and the Sliver, had just conceded this point in Harkles's favour, when The O'Haleron came hurrying in with the brisk air of a man on business, and joined them.

"I say," he exclaimed, aiming at Mr. Harkles, who was within earshot, "someone should see to the old Terrier. It would be a Christian charity to get him quietly off home."

"Why don't you see to him yourself?" Callowabbey asked lazily.

"Not me. It's not my turn," The O'Haleron objected.

Covert glances were cast at Mr. Harkles, but that gentleman sat immovable.

"Ahem!" Ballard and Sarb gave out in his full-bodied voice. "The old Terrier has exceeded again. Someone must see him safe home."

But "The grave, silent man" was not to be caught listening to other men's conversation.

In a whisper Callowabbey suggested that they should send a servant to Harkles, to tell him that Lord Terry de Beach wanted him.

"I'll go myself, if you like," offered the obliging Sliver.

Harkles's countenance when the Sliver accosted him was illegible, but he rose at once deliberately, and left the room.

Ballard and Sarb's eyes sought the ceiling.

"Philanthropist!" he murmured.

"D'ye suppose now Harkles has any human feeling for the old man?" The O'Haleron speculated.

"As much feeling as a hat has for the peg it hangs on," was Ballard and Sarb's opinion; "they are interdependent."

Harkles found the Terrier desperately clinging to the settee, which he conceived to be tottering on the edge of the bottomless pit. He had been exhorting Colonel Kedlock to repent while it was called to-day. "Letsh pray," he suggested, but Colonel Kedlock was fast asleep. The Terrier wanted to fall on his knees, but there was no room, with the bottomless pit

worth as a subtle humourist amusing himself at their expense, had shaken their faith in their own infallibility and prepared them for further surprises. This had kept them on the lookout, and was sharpening their insight, a faculty hitherto not much in evidence amongst them. Men, looked into inquiringly, are found to be rich in possibilities which a cursory glance does not reveal. Strangworth was still "good old Strangworth," but with higher respect. He had been clever enough to take them all in, amazingly clever that is to say, and "how he got there" was worth finding out, if only in self-defence. Thus Strangworth, whose butt they had been while they supposed themselves to be making a butt of him, became an example to be studied for profit. The study of Strangworth was leading to unexpected developments. Values were shifting. Muscularity might be manly, but it began to appear that there was more in manliness than mere muscularity, mental or physical. "Moral Muscle" had somehow slipped into use as a catchword, and mention had even been made of "The beautiful things of life," without causing a roar of laughter. "The Life Beautiful," as an expression, also came up in argument, and was sifted for its meaning, when it was found that the things of which it was said to be composed were the things which had mostly been ranked as "rot" in the Club—an ugly word, and the reaction was all against ugliness. So, by a subtle process, values were being transposed. Things that had been thought rather fine—sporting, you know—began to look ugly, while their opposites in the conduct of life, tested by results, could not be called so. It was said of Col Drindon, for instance, that he was a far nicer chap than he used to be, and better-looking into the bargain. Such symptoms of an approaching spiritual awakening might be multiplied, but they were not understood. Fellows complained of being out of tune; nothing was right for them; and there was much grumbling. They called their dissatisfaction "Spoiling for a change." But it was not a spoiling; it was a ripening.

The night was close and the windows of the smoking-room were open, but the stagnant air was heavy with fumes of tobacco and alcohol, and men, breathing each other's poisonous exhalations, were not feeling up to much. Mr. Harkles looked more alive than any of them. He also looked well content with himself, a fact which was attracting as much speculative attention as he could desire. It was whispered about that the

what he was doing as he pretended and had some nasty trick up his sleeve, and the dread of what might come of it if a move provoked his resentment, he sat in acute anxiety. When the door opened and the Senior Youngsters looked in, the worst seemed to have happened, and it was a relief. After suspense the call to action is a happy release, and Mr. Harkles was instantly on his mettle to turn a ridiculous and difficult position to good account. He put on qualities as he put on his coats, his choice ruled by the occasion. He knew his men. A pathetically appealing, protesting glance now, and he had been undone in their estimation for ever. The man who put up a good fight was their man. Stolidly, cheerfully, as a nurse on duty, he braved their scrutiny. He was Harkles sacrificing himself for the "Sick Man's" sake. They remembered his humane plea of "Sick Man," used to excuse the informalities of the "Sick Man's" conduct. Moral Muscle, that was it! To sit tight under the circumstances a man must surely have moral muscle! Moral muscle should be respected, and they were for quietly withdrawing to let Harkles down easily, when the Terrier opened a wicked old eye and claimed their attention. His head forsook the comfort of his Julius's padded shoulder a moment, to make sure of them.

"Dav'd an' Jon'than," he summed up the situation with a wink, "Dav'd an' Jon'than—beashtly drunk."

Nevertheless, the impression of Harkles sacrificing himself for the Sick Man's sake persisted, and it was "Good old Harkles!"

"I believe he's a human being annyway," The O'Haleron said afterwards. "It's a pity of him, he does what he can."

That expression, "It's a pity of him," caught on. Harkles, at any rate, had not been "beastly drunk." It was remembered, to his credit, that he had never been seen in that disreputable state. The injustice of the accusation argued in favour of the other more serious denunciation having also been alcoholic in its origin and equally unjust.

"This kind of thing is in front of us all if we don't take care, and must be stopped," said Ballard and Sarb magisterially.

"This kind of thing" was taken to mean, comprehensively, both cause and effect. It was after that that non-alcoholic

drinks ceased to be called "cat-lap," and an embargo began to be tacitly set on "Every inordinate cup." By the way, also, without more ado, Mr. Harkles found himself rehabilitated.

CHAPTER X

DEARLY YE PAY——

"Poor race of men!" said the pitying Spirit,
"Dearly ye pay for your primal Fall—
Some flow'rets of Eden ye still inherit,
But the trail of the Serpent is over them all!"

—MOORE.

1

"FLAG'S up at the Castle!"

The word sped from Castlefield Saye along the whole countryside. The Duke was in residence, and everyone felt the better for the news; for never was man more beloved, nor Duke more respected. Yet among them all there was no lonelier man than he. For what comfort of love is there in the abstract love of a whole countryside if not one human being is near enough to a man to be in concrete touch with his heart? The lonely man is never lonelier than in a crowd, and the Duke was always loneliest under his own roof when the house was full. It was his habit then, his duties as head of the house punctiliously performed, to shut himself up in his own sanctum, where, as Melton told Ella, only under especial circumstances did any one venture to intrude upon him. "Business of state" and "private affairs" excused his seclusion; and nobody but the little Duchess even wondered if these were enough for his happiness. She only was not satisfied. She only, when he appeared again, searched the settled melancholy of his brooding countenance for a gleam which should set her anxious doubts at rest. The power to love is bestowed for higher qualities than the intellect can boast. Even stupid, silly little women, if they have seen to the nourishment of their own souls, may win the rich endowment, and, in the light of a great love, see clearer than the cleverest man. Never by a word had the Duke given her reason to suspect that he suffered from the in-

completeness of his life, but she did suspect it, and was forever tormented with the dread that he might find elsewhere the companionship he lacked, forever petitioning heaven for the one boon, that she might not lose him. Yet, so that he was true to her, she would have had him have the happiness which, in gratitude for his goodness, she claimed that he deserved. He knew only her limitations. To him she was the child that never grows up, and must be managed tactfully and kindly, and protected, but never entrusted with any part of the serious business of life. He did not realise that smallness of mind may be balanced by largeness of heart, and that often when the mind would have been at fault the heart leaps to the right conclusion.

The Castle stood on an eminence, and from the windows of his room he commanded a lovely prospect of wood and meadow and arable land, all his own as far as the eye could reach on either side, but bounded in front by the sea. Immediately opposite, across a narrow valley, like a sentry eternally on guard, rose the giant crag of the Coastguard's Death. Left on this central height the cliffs, falling away abruptly, ended in sand-dunes; and the low-lying shore, curving out to a distant point, held the bay as in the bend of an arm. The Duke stood often in the window, dreamily watching the waves expend themselves on the yellow, rock-strewn, sandy beach far below. When he could devise no more active occupation to beguile the time, he stood there, a pathetic figure, patiently intent on the patient waves.

One morning after his rupture with Ella he had busied himself cleaning the great Gainsborough portrait of his grandmother, the picture he had of late years always kept covered up. It had been taken out of its frame, and stood on the floor up against the wall, with the dark crimson velvet curtain, which had concealed it, for a background. It had needed cleaning, and he stood off from it now that he had done, admiring colour and details, which had come out as purely as if the picture were fresh from the studio. He had determined to banish the picture altogether. Nevermore during his lifetime was it to delight his own or any other eyes. This was a leave-taking, though not a sad one apparently, for he was smiling, and the lovely face he was looking into seemed on the point of responding to his smile. It was a life-sized figure, standing, and animated, as if about to step forward—an effect accentu-

ated by her position on the floor, the crimson curtain, and the darkness of the background of brown trees, against which her white dress stood out conspicuously. The Duke, gazing at her, looked happy for once.

In a moment of relief during a heartsick, anxious time, people are apt to feel as if the worst were over. That was how the Duke was feeling—thanks to Strangworth, and also, indirectly, to Bosc; though Bosc, to begin with, had seriously added to his perplexities. For Bosc, more indispensable than ever until the Duke's present difficulty with Ella had blown over, had curtly resigned from his service immediately after the rupture, and where was such another man to be found to manage the Corner House? "Conscientious scruples" was the only reason Bosc would give for breaking with his firm's most important client, and what the devil he meant by that the Duke was at a loss to think. Mr. Bosc's "conscientious scruples" were due to the version Ella had given him of her last interview with the Duke, which, fortunately, in Ella's interests, he had confided to Mr. Strangworth. He had, in fact, sent for Strangworth, and Strangworth, like the good fellow he was, had returned to England at the greatest inconvenience to himself, and had so far unravelled the tangle that he was able to come again to Castlefield Saye to reassure the Duke. He had returned to town that day, and was to see Ella, and the Duke had little fear of the result, hence his relief. But he was not yet out of the wood. For he had consented to let Strangworth explain the position to his wife. Strangworth had always insisted from the first that that was the best thing to do. If only he had taken Strangworth's advice long ago the whole upset would have been over now, but, as it was, there was a dreadful interview with his wife still to be faced. No man could face such an interview with equanimity, least of all with such a woman. Still, she was one to be talked over, and Strangworth was one to talk anybody over; but talking her over was apt to last only for the time being, and the Duke foresaw dark days ahead, when he would find himself again and again confronted with the painful task.

He was roused from his reverie by a perfunctory knock at the door. Someone entered unceremoniously. Surprised, he turned from the picture, and found himself confronted by his eldest son.

"Why, Ninian!" he exclaimed, greeting him with a cordial

grasp of the hand. "Dear boy! Delighted to see you! Sit down."

Melton dropped into a chair with his back to the picture, at which he had not even glanced. He had no eye for great Gainsboroughs just then. His father sat on the swivel-chair turned from his writing-table. In his pleasure at seeing his son and settling down for a chat, it had escaped him that the young man was agitated.

"You've neglected your parents, sir, of late," he reproached him genially. "Your mother's been pining for you. Missed you myself, too. Wondered if you were ever coming home again. As for the horses! Eating their heads off. Platinum especially. Your Platinum. A terror to the men. Never properly exercised—— Not ill, my boy?" he broke off, suddenly struck by Melton's pallor.

"No, sir, thank you. Only a little bothered. In fact, I——" he hesitated, then plunged. "I've come about—about something serious."

His trepidation was evident now. His father smiled. It did not occur to him that Ninian might have got himself into a scrape. Ninian had never done anything in his life that his father thought reprehensible. "You look like marriage," he exclaimed, jumping to a conclusion that pleased him. "That's the thing that makes a young man nervous. When I had to face my family with the announcement—— Gad! I shook."

"I've come to ask your approval, sir——"

"It is marriage, then!" his father interrupted. "Well, that's a step I'm ready to approve. Been ready a good while. High time you were married. Who's the lady? Do I know her?"

"Yes, sir, and like her, I believe. My happiness would be marred if you did not altogether approve of my choice."

"Made your choice before consulting me, eh? I see. Young man-like. Did the same myself." He suppressed a sigh.

"But I remembered your advice, sir," Melton put in, encouraged by his father's genial sympathy. "You have always insisted that I should marry 'good blood' in the sense of physical fitness. My choice is physically as well as mentally splendid—without a flaw—very beautiful."

The Duke had changed countenance. "Then you propose to marry beneath you," he said.

"In the one particular of birth, sir," Melton protested. "A country girl, a farmer's daughter, but highly educated—nat-

urally refined—able—fine character." In haste to get to the unarguable point, he stumbled over the string of attributes. "Just what I have heard you approve in a wife hundreds of times."

"Who is she?" the Duke asked impatiently.

"Ella Banks."

"What ! ! !"

The Duke rose slowly, his face ghastly, horror in his eyes, his whole frame aquiver.

Melton, startled, rose too.

His father was trying to speak. "Ninian," he managed to articulate at last, "you cannot marry Ella Banks."

"But, sir——"

"You cannot marry Ella Banks," his father reiterated harshly.

There was obstinate determination in Melton's face. "This is unfair," he said, and compressed his lips.

For the third time his father repeated: "You cannot marry Ella Banks."

"I am sorry to oppose you, sir," Melton was beginning, but the expression of his father's face cut short his words. The Duke's eyes were on the picture. Involuntarily Melton turned to see what had called up the look in them, and, as he turned it seemed to him that Ella herself, as he had seen her the evening before, in her eighteenth century white satin and lace dress, with a string of pearls round her neck, stepped towards him.

The effect was momentary. Then he saw the figure as a portrait. "When was that done?" he exclaimed. "She told me she'd never been painted!"

But as he spoke he remembered the picture, the Gainsborough portrait of his great-grandmother, which he had not seen for years. Yet also—it was Ella. "What does it mean?" he gasped, turning to his father.

The Duke spoke like a man in the throes of acute physical pain: "Don't you—see—what it means?"

The young man was trembling now. He looked again at the portrait, which was Ella and not Ella. The small dark head, the satin skin, the perfect modelling of form and feature, the Brabant type at its best—his own type. A question rose to his lips, but it seemed to him as if someone else asked it: "Who is—Ella?"

With bowed head his father groaned two words, terrible to both in their significance: "I—confess."

It seemed to Melton that they stood there for a hundred years, staring into each other's contorted faces, before he clutched at a chair to save himself from falling. Dancing before his eyes were Ella and himself, linked by the likeness which had always haunted him, though undefined until now.

"Then she is my——" But the word died on his dry lips. He knew. Yet he argued against the conviction. "She is not your——" Again the word failed him.

He seemed to hear his father say, "She is."

In an agony of wrath and despair Melton burst out: "Yours the sin then—and ours—ours the shame!"

"Shame!" His father caught him up. "What shame to you? You are not—*married?*"

Melton's haggard eyes answered that.

Then, for an interminable time, it was as if there was nothing more to be said. The shock had numbed all feeling.

In the interval, somehow, strangely, they ceased to be for each other as father and son, and were two men of the gentleman breed, responsible, with a woman to protect, one of their own, in danger of destruction, who must at all costs be saved. Restraint was the habit of their lives, and, given the direction of their thoughts, few words sufficed for their understanding.

The Duke was the first to recover himself. "What is to be done?" he asked huskily.

Melton had already made up his mind that there was but one thing to be done. He would have spared his father even a question, but one he was forced to ask on Ella's account, to make sure: "Is there any legal proof?"

"None."

"Then she would be safe in her present position if——" He stopped short.

"If what?" his father asked sharply.

Melton nodded towards the picture. "If that were destroyed," he said convincingly, as though it were what he had had in his mind.

He went to the window from which was the seaward view, and stood awhile with his back to his father, looking up across the valley at the Coastguard's Death.

The Duke sank into the swivel-chair, and sat half-turned from the writing-table, his body bent, his eyes exploring the

floor, his countenance distraught. One arm rested on the table, in his hand he clutched a penknife with which he cut and scraped and stabbed and dug expressively. Had it occurred to him to cut and scrape and stab and dig into himself instead of the table, it would have been a relief.

Melton returned to him, stood looking down at him, his face serious, set, but irradiated. Suffering for himself was over. Suffering for others, the acutest form, still racked him, but he could act for them, rescue them, and in the act—a mere by-product of it, not his motive; no selfish consideration tainted his motive—he would win for himself the guerdon of self-sacrifice, the crown of peace.

Looking down on the bowed grey head that had always been held so high, he felt only compassion. He yearned to speak comfort. His head throbbed, his heart was bursting with the desire. His heart prompted him well.

"It was in no way her fault," he said. "She stood out long for your consent. She said she owed all her good in life to your kindness, and it would be the basest ingratitude to deceive you. She even drove me away from her, but I had over-persuaded her—or something happened to change her mind——"

The Duke looked up quickly. Strangworth had explained the fatal misunderstanding of each other during that last wretched interview, which had resulted in this catastrophe.

"Did she tell you what had happened?" he asked.

"No. She only said her eyes had been opened, and she saw that I was right. I had insisted that the thing to ask was, not your consent, but your blessing. I thought I knew your mind. I thought the Little Lady would reconcile herself best when there was no help for it. And I was right."

"You've told your mother!" the Duke exclaimed.

"Yes. And she only thought of you."

"Thought of me!" The Duke was incredulous. That silly weak little woman to think of anything but her own annoyance, impossible! "What did she say? What happened?"

"She seemed overcome. She said first, 'Give me time to pull myself together. I only want time to pull myself together!' She cried very much for a little. Then suddenly she composed herself. She said then, 'My poor boy! Go to your father!'"

"Was that all?"

"It was the way she said it."

The Duke concluded that Strangworth, for some reason, or

other, had gone without enlightening her. That was something to thank God for! The marriage, minus the detail which made it a tragedy, was as much as she could bear. She could be kept in ignorance of the worst—that was the way out of it for her. But the other two? In great agitation he reiterated helplessly, "What is to be done? Legally the position is impregnable. There isn't a tittle of evidence to go upon but that portrait. And only Princess Anna remembered it well enough to suspect—— She refreshed Strangworth's memory. No fear of them. Good friends both. Consulted Strangworth myself. Didn't take his advice. God help us! What are we to do?"

Melton's eyes upraised, shining, were on the Coastguard's Death. His father, turning to look at him, saw him so—calm, beautiful, a young man at his best; born to all that the world thinks worth having, and with every quality in himself to insure his making good use of his means; a son to love and be proud of—ruined, for no fault of his own. His father's self-control gave way. Starting to his feet, with hands clenched, he cried: "I can't bear it! I can't bear it!"

Melton responded to that bitter cry, as to a cry for help. He clasped his father's arm, he laid his head on his shoulder, he uttered appealingly the first word that came to him, the first word he had ever uttered, his own first baby word—"Papa!"

It brought him back to his father, a toddling child, hurt, and come for comfort, come to his father as he always did in preference to all others, with his dear one word—"Pa-pa!"

But it was his father who was sobbing now.

Melton guided him to his chair, and stood beside him, holding his hand.

A wave of recollection swept the unhappy father back to the days when he could not see enough of his firstborn; when he would steal the boy away from the great lady in the nursery, who was always on guard to prevent breaches of discipline; when they would sit together in a big armchair in this very room, the boy on his father's knee, absorbed in the picture-book, all gorgeous with colour, which was kept there for such happy occasions. The room was not embattled in those days against intrusion as it had since become, and Mamma would catch them at it, when "Baby" should be out—or something—and kneeling beside them, with her arms round them both, adoring them, would call them "Naughty!" They had long drifted apart, all three. But father and son, though going their separate

ways, disunited, were always the best of friends, and had held each other dear. And now, in the horror of the calamity that had fallen upon them, they clung together once more, the sinner and the sinned against, each blaming himself.

The Duke sat bent in his chair, covering his face with his handkerchief. Melton standing beside him holding his hand, faltered in broken sentences, as he could, words that wounded to heal: "You have been such a good father to me. . . . I have to thank you for life . . . for a happy life. . . . To think that I should have brought this sorrow upon you!"

"My fault! My most grievous fault! You two—my dearest! Why don't you curse me!"

"Hush! There is good to come out of it all. . . . I know there is. A little while . . . and the pain will have passed . . . Oh! I bitterly grieve that I—said what I did—just now. Can you forgive me?"

"Can you—ever forgive me?"

"Nothing to forgive . . . common fault . . . error of judgment. But we must think . . . think a way out——"

After a long pause, he added collected: "You will always remember that I saw something stronger than you or me in—all this. I don't say that we didn't know better. I should have been honest with you. But I am only a man. Men make these mistakes because of their great mistake . . ."

He meant the mistake men make when, breaking the higher law of life, they are false to honour at the call of their lower nature.

After a little he added: "You will protect her."

His father pressed his hand.

"Perhaps," he began again, "it will be best if I go now. We should recover ourselves better alone. We must hide our trouble. Perhaps, if I go now—when we meet again—it will be better."

He clasped his father's hand, a long clasp, and dropped it. The Duke sat in darkness, his face concealed. There was a pause, and then he heard his son's light step as he left the room.

In that pause Melton looked his last at the portrait which was Ella and not Ella—at the buoyant figure stepping forward to greet him as she stepped, at the radiant young face glad and aglow, the lips parted as though about to utter the welcome he must never hear again. There was anguish, the worst he suffered, in that mute farewell.

Except for that one flash of reproach, he had borne himself nobly. And now, without bitterness, without blame except of himself, only in sorrow for the sorrow that was and was to be, he gave himself to the sacrifice which it seemed to him that honour insisted upon—the one thing to be done—and bore himself nobly to the end.

2

The Duke sat in darkness of his own making, his face covered with his hands, his mind a clouded turmoil of phantasms; past, present, and future confounded in one. He had but one clear thought, that it was laid upon him to think, and he could not think. But he could hear. He heard the tap-tap of high heels on the parquet of the corridor that led to his room, the sound that heralded his wife's approach, a sound that had always exasperated him ("Why didn't she walk on the carpet?") and one to be dreaded now. It had never occurred to him that in her delicacy she desired to warn him of her approach by the tap-tap of her heels, that he might escape should her visit be unwelcome. Mechanically he fell into his habitual pose at the threat, seized paper and pen, affected to be busy writing. But the necessity for action had roused and steadied him. The interview must be faced sooner or later. Better get it over. He turned a troubled face to her as she entered the room. But this was not the little Duchess as he had expected to see her, miserable, angry, on the warpath. It was a woman dignified by overwhelming grief, stoically endured. Surprised, he forgot to rise, as was his wont, to receive her.

She came to him, her poor little hands fluttering before her as though she were groping her way, fell on her knees beside him, and looking up at him, her hands clasped, her face tense with controlled emotion, in pitiful tones beseeched him: "Dear, let me help you!"

It was as if the ivy, suddenly standing up straight and strong, had told the storm-battered oak to lean on it.

He stared at her stupidly.

"Oh, dearest!" she reproached him tenderly. "All these years! Why, why did you not tell me long ago? All these years, and you knew that I prayed every day and twice a day, *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.* Dear, we are all sinners, but *If we confess our sins,*

He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And how could I, a poor weak woman, refuse to forgive when He forgives?"

He laid his hand on hers, and turned his head away, shamed by her magnanimity, bitterly blaming himself for having failed to appreciate her heart because of her mind. It is not the brilliant intellect but the loyal heart that makes life tolerable.

"Besides, dear," she pursued, intent on helping him, "it might have been so much worse for me, supposing your interest in her had been of the other kind as it might have been. There's Lord Terry de Beach, you know, older than you, and that Cruxhaven woman, young enough to be his granddaughter. And I was always afraid of that girl. Oh! she has been our curse! Though," she caught herself up, "I do believe not intentionally. Dearest, forgive me if I hurt you. Of course, you love her. And I want to be a comfort to you. I want to help you. Whatever you think best now, I will do it."

"Your goodness shames me," he answered huskily.

"God's goodness, dear, who makes all things work together for good if we love Him. . . . It isn't as if it had never happened before," she ran on, with a sound, conservative respect for precedent, "even in the Bible. There was Hagar, and God raised no objection, though it didn't turn out well, but that was because of Sarah, and I should be heartbroken were it any worse for you than it is, because of me. Besides, it is so long ago, and if we troubled about things that happened long ago we should always be troubling. I'm glad to have it over and done with. It was so much more dreadful when it was there, always hanging over me."

"Hanging over you?" he exclaimed.

"They say, you know, that a woman who has children loses her husband," she explained.

"Who say?" he asked sharply.

"Oh, women one meets."

He understood her to mean women of her own class.

"Women you meet have a nice opinion of their husbands!" he answered grimly.

"They know them," she sighed. "And as it is so—— But it is better not to know. It made a difference to Ann."

This was a revelation. Never before had she hinted a suspicion of him, and she must have suffered. Ann was weak

mentally and physically. A pang of remorse wrung a groan from him.

"I did not mean to wound you, dearest," she cried in distress. "It escaped me. And I shouldn't have said "you know," because how could you know? Women say so many things to each other that men never hear. And that's done with. There's nothing now hanging over me."

That suspense, so ended, should be a relief gave him the measure of her pain.

"And you have always loved my children, dearest," she added, with a dry sob; "that has kept me up—so very beautiful!"

She had known all along, then, that he did not love her!

"You love your own too, naturally," she went on in a lower tone, curiously dividing the children between them. "Of course you love her. And it—it was all so long ago. I don't mind now. Of course you love her. It is a relief to know that—that you ought to love her. Poor victim! But," she added hurriedly, "all that is repented of, and there is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner that repents, and I rejoice now, though I am no angel."

"To that—I don't agree."

The contradiction was balm to her poor bruised heart. "How sweet of you!" she exclaimed. "You are always so very good and kind!"

He thought she was taking it too well, that she had failed to understand the tragic bearings of what had happened, but he was mistaken. She had been keeping her feelings on that point under, to make it easier for him. Besides, in this time of disaster, she had no need to ponder pros and cons, as reasoning beings must. She had intuition, and the instinct to fight for her own was strong in her. Woman-like, she had seen her way in a flash, and was prepared to act.

"Have you—realised—what has befallen?" he stammered at last, thinking it best that she should.

"Have I realised what has befallen!" she burst out, contemptuous of the supposition. "My poor boy!" She broke down at that, and sobbed bitterly.

"Realised!" she repeated when she had recovered herself. "And to think that, if only you had understood me, trusted me, told me—long ago—this horror would never have happened!"

It was the one reproach that escaped her; regretted as soon as uttered. He bowed to the justice of it.

She had risen, and stood frowning, her eyes on the floor, her little hands clasped and still for once, strenuously controlling herself.

"He does not despair," she said, reminiscently taking comfort in the thought. "He spoke hopefully. 'There is a way out,' he said."

"Must trust us to do what is right in the matter," the Duke muttered.

She paid no attention to him. "It is to Heaven that we are bound to confess," she said. "Heaven forgives—the world, never! But this is no concern of the world's. It is our business; a family matter; a skeleton to be kept in the cupboard. Great families have always skeletons in their cupboards." Precedent was again a comfort. "Ninian must go abroad—be exiled until——" She had it in her mind that the girl would die of a broken heart, as a duty, poor thing. They always do in tragic romances. But she stopped short in time to spare him the suggestion, and said instead: "We must do what we can for her. She—she can live in retirement. I—I will be kind to her."

He had turned to the table, his elbows rested on it, his face was covered with his hands.

She concluded that he acquiesced. Pityingly, tenderly, she put her arm round his neck, kissed his bowed head. He groped blindly for her hand, pressed it, and hid his face again. For her the worst was over; the past buried; and the future not hopeless. He must be made to face the future as not hopeless. What could she say? Her inconsequent mind, easily diverted from one thing to another, helped her now, when a cleverer woman would have been at a loss. A clattering of iron shoes on the stones of the courtyard below distracted her attention. She ran to the open window. "He's going for a ride!" she exclaimed. "He said he would go for a ride. A ride will do him good. He's mounting. There! He's up! Oh! Naughty Platinum! He *is* capering. As if he didn't know who it was! But he does! He's quiet now. He knows who he's carrying. Aren't horses wonderful? So intelligent! Ninian is looking up. His face is perfectly beautiful." She shook out her little wet handkerchief. "Good-bye, dear boy!"

Cheerily came the reply: "Good-bye! Be happy about—everything—till we meet again, mother. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, darling! God be with you!"

In darkness the father listened till the thud of the horse's hoofs died away in the distance. Then he rose, kissed her, thanked her in a broken voice, led her to the door. "I shall be better alone," he excused himself. "Must make arrangements."

Making arrangements means looking forward, a restorative pursuit. Satisfied that he felt as she did, and with a brave smile to encourage him, she left him. She was blessed with the power to forgive and the ease of mind that ensues; but there is no blessed ease of mind for the forgiven who cannot forgive themselves. Only a bullet in his brain could have eased his mind; but he was not that kind of coward. There was no way out of it for him; he had to live on their account, whom he had wronged. And he condemned himself to live, even while, in the first agony of remorse, he cried aloud: "God, have mercy upon me, and annihilate me, that I may feel no more. I am in hell."

3

All that day the sun shone on the Corner House. The door was shut on the public, and there was stillness and solitude where all had been life and bustle. Late in the afternoon Ella looked into the empty ballroom. The Princess Anna had sent for her, and she was waiting for her carriage, ready dressed. The Argus-Eyed and Miss Hildenborough had gone out to amuse themselves. There was holiday in the house and holiday in Ella's heart. No shadow of a foreboding disturbed her. The Princess Anna had sent for her on other occasions; there was nothing in that. The Royal Lady had been her steady patroness from the first, a staunch, good friend and able adviser. She had probably heard the news, it was to have been announced that day. Would she scold or congratulate her favourite *protégée*? Ella was thinking that it didn't much matter. She had mounted the final step up, had arrived, and was safe. It came into her mind that the Duke must have had a bad half-hour that morning—serve him right; though it was not without a pang of regret that she thought of him. That she should have had to make him pay would always be a grief to her, but there was no help for it; she had sworn to make them all pay who had despitefully treated the poor; and only she and he would ever know for what he had paid and how much. And poor Ninian must have had a bad half-hour of it too, but that

was all over now, and by this time he would be on his way back to her, the happiest of men!

She looked resplendent in her triumph. As she drove through the streets she was more than ever aware of admiring eyes. Stopped close to the kerb by a block in the traffic, she heard one man ask another, "Who's the young duchess?" The answer was contemptuous of "duchess." "Duchess! Queen, I should say. Queen of Beauty!" Oh, the good omen! Queens have power! They may be happy too in love. Was there a man of them all that she passed to be compared to Ninian!

One incident made her smile. She overtook Lady Janet Brastaby's carriage bound in the same direction. Seated beside Lady Janet was Lord Terry de Beach enjoying the present in repentance of the past—though unaware, as yet, of all that he had to repent. On the back seat opposite sat Mr. Harkles, piously conforming to the exigencies of the moment. In fulfilment of her promise to Mr. Strangworth, Lady Janet had captured the old Terrier, and had been obliged to resign herself, as she had foreseen, to the inevitable Harkles. He had adapted his dress to the serious-mindedness now required of him, and wore also a suitable expression of countenance. Ella wondered amusedly if staylaces were helping the new decorative effect.

The carriages pulled up simultaneously in the courtyard of the palace. Lady Janet was on duty, and it was she who introduced Ella, and at a sign from her Royal Mistress withdrew, leaving them alone together.

Ella, self-possessed herself, noticed with surprise that the Princess was nervous—serious also, and specially kind and considerate. She made Ella sit down. And Ella misinterpreted these symptoms. She took it that a scolding was coming, but that, in mitigation, she was at the same time being recognised as lawfully raised from the ranks.

"*Wunderkind,*" the Princess began abruptly, her loud, thick voice subdued, as though she feared to be overheard (her pronunciation of English is best left to the imagination). "*Wunderkind,* Mr. Strangworth came to town to-day. He came from my dear old friend, your father, to tell you who you are. But he felt it a difficult story for a man to tell you, so he came first to consult me, and I, respecting his delicacy—and yours—took it upon myself to tell you the story. There are only three persons alive now who know this story, I and Mr. Strangworth and your father."

Ella stared at her, too bewildered to form a conjecture as to what might be coming.

"You never heard that your grandmother had two daughters, no? You shall see why. She was not of the village where you were brought up. She came there a stranger, and her way was not to talk. The poor easily cover up their traces if they hold their tongues; they don't imagine a past for each other. But it is too long a story to tell you now all how it happened; only this you need know. Your grandmother had two daughters. One of them went into service, the other Lady Alicia Brabant took into her household. Lady Alicia befriended many young girls, had them taught, started them in life. That was what she intended to do for this young girl with the mother's consent. The girl was wilful and would not learn the lacemaking, and Lady Alicia proposed to fit her for some more congenial occupation, but she became attached to her as to no other, and educated her above her position, and kept her for a companion. She was a lovely creature, and sweet; fair, with the bluest eyes. Her portrait——"

Light broke upon Ella. She uttered an exclamation. Her heart was thumping painfully, though she had as yet no idea of what was coming.

"You know the portrait, yes?" the Princess asked.

"I have it," Ella answered. "I did not know who it was."

"How did you feel about that portrait?" the Royal Lady asked with interest.

"I found it by accident, hidden away. I have kept it in my own room, for my own, ever since."

The Princess nodded her head several times, as though the reply were what she had expected.

"So!" she exclaimed, then abruptly resumed: "The girl was a good girl, but there is always love. When nature uses love for her own purposes, love is an irresistible force; and love came to her from a quarter no one would have expected. I don't exonerate her lover, but he had his excuse. He was heart-lonely, and they were thrown together."

Ordinarily the Princess would not have gone into the ethics of the case at all. Such incidents were too common in her walk of life to excite that kind of comment. So long as there was no dangerous publicity it was customary to ignore if not to excuse the irregularity, and custom when it is convenient becomes second nature. But she had been warned of Ella's "peas-

ant rectitude" with its uncharitable hardness, and she was for melting and moving her to forgive.

"The girl was in as good hands," she proceeded, "as any girl could be who is not married to her lover. He was one to be tenderly considerate; one with a high sense of responsibility. There would have been no broken hearts but for your virtuous grandmother. She had the law on her side and threatened to use it if her daughter were not restored to her. To have resisted would have made bad worse, and nothing gained. She snatched the girl from her lover, and your mother died of the separation when you were born."

"But I am Ellery Banks's daughter, and my mother was married to my father," Ella insisted.

"It was your mother's sister that Ellery Banks married," the Princess answered gently. "Her little daughter was born about the same time that you were, and she also—the mother—died. Your grandmother took both the motherless babes, and came a stranger to the village where you grew up. Your grandmother was a fierce, strong woman; she had no comprehension of human weakness and no pity for it. She had been ruthless to her daughter, she was ruthless to your father. She swore to be revenged, and she found a way. For he wanted you. He wanted you to be brought up with every advantage that a daughter of his should have. He humbled himself, he begged and prayed; but the terrible old woman would neither give you up, nor accept a farthing from him, and it was not possible to coerce her. Imagine it, Ella! He had loved your mother passionately if—if illegally; and he adored his child, and could do nothing. Had the grandmother died, of course—— But she did not die soon enough. Not until she had revenged herself in full. The death of Ellery Banks's baby gave her her chance. She had held herself aloof from her neighbours. Nobody knew anything about her except what she had thought fit to tell them. She told them, and she told Ellery Banks the same story, that her daughter in London had died a widow. That disposed of any father who might have claimed you. And young babes look much the same to people who only see them casually. The villagers did not know which was which, neither did Ellery Banks. So, when his child died, it was a simple matter to bury it as the other daughter's child, and pass you off on Ellery Banks as his own. That was her revenge. She boasted of it to your father. He wanted you, and she had put

you out of his reach forever. For him it was impossible to expose the fraud. He had no proof. And even if he had had any proof, how, in his circumstances, could he have used it?"

She paused. Ella sat rigid, her eyes staring, her face colourless, her hands tight-clenched on her lap, her thoughts in a tumult. But good blood makes no outcry. She had hardly spoken since she sat down, and, except for a low exclamation now and then, had restrained her emotion.

The Princess hurried now to finish her painful task. "Your father only half believed the children had been changed," she proceeded; "but he never lost sight of you, and as you grew up his doubts were resolved. You have grown to be the living image of a portrait your father has of his grandmother in her youth. The portrait has been hidden away for years, but I remembered it, and so did Gregor Strangworth. I remembered it when first I saw you. I suspected who you were on the instant. I brought Mr. Strangworth to see you, and he too was sure. I told your father what I thought. It was a relief to him to unburden his grief to me; he was glad to have me for your friend. He has been very unhappy, your father, because he dared not own his incomparable girl. We thought—I and Gregor—that you should be told, but your father feared. There is much of your grandmother in you. He feared you would rather be the legitimate daughter of Ellery Banks than his own love-child."

Ella's eyes, riveted on her, never flinched from their expressionless stare.

"We hear lately," the Princess went on, nervously toying with her trinkets, "we hear that Lord Melton is much at the Corner House. When I heard that, I determined without leave to tell you who you are. I was prepared when Gregor came to-day. *Wunderkind,* you cannot marry Ninian Brabant. He is your father's son."

Ella's eyes closed at that, she swayed in her chair, but she did not lose consciousness—a dazed consciousness. She was too stunned to think. She knew that they were giving her wine; she drank it mechanically. Then somehow she was in her carriage, with Lady Janet Brastaby seated beside her.

Lady Janet understood that Ella had had a sudden attack of faintness, a thing anybody might have at any time for no special reason, and she was seeing her home, and not troubling her to talk, as she still seemed rather queer.

The newsboys were calling the evening papers. One item, vociferously reiterated, caught Lady Janet's wandering attention.

"Tragic accident in High Life! Eldest son of the Duke of Castlefield Saye"—then with a yell, *"Killed!"* "Marquis of Melton, eldest son of the Duke of Castlefield Saye"—and again that yell, *"Killed!"*

A boy was running beside the carriage. "Tragic accident in high life—piper, lidy?"

She caught the paper and threw him a coin.

"How dreadful!" she exclaimed, too shocked to notice Ella.

She skimmed the paragraph aloud. "Rode out in high spirits—thoroughbred horse very fresh—lost control of him—plunged from the summit of the giant crag of the Coatsguard's Death into the sea, hundreds of feet below."

"His mother's dream. And he waved his hand and went over with a cheer!"

Lady Janet stared at Ella, horrified at what she mistook for callousness. She read the rest of the paragraph to herself.

"It has just transpired that the unfortunate young marquis was only lately privately married to a young lady renowned for her beauty, Miss Ella Banks, daughter of Mr. Ellery Banks, of Red Rose Farm, Thatshire——

"Ella! Ella!" Lady Janet cried, torn with pity.

Ella smiled. She knew now what was happening. She was dreaming, of course; a horrid nightmare dream. She would awaken presently and tell Ninian. She must try to wake herself. . . . What a dreadful crowd. . . . As in dreams, without any sense of transition, she found herself at the Corner House, in the hall, and all about her was a nightmare crowd of phantoms and friends, but their reality was reversed; the dead lived, the living were spectres. The veil she had wilfully refused to have lifted was rent; her eyes and ears were opened. She saw as it were Brabants materialised from their painted portraits, mixing fantastically in the dresses of their day, as characters in fancy-dress might have mixed, with people she knew in modern dress,—hustling them, jostling them, and clamorous. They called her a Brabant—"Now you know!" They reproached her that she repelled their efforts to warn her—"This is your fault!" . . . The Argus-Eyed, Miss Hildenbor-

ough, Beveridge, Pecky Tim, Mrs. Bosc, Col Drindon, phantoms all, were powerless in the throng that bore down upon her, claiming her. Only Mr. Strangworth was keeping them back; only he could save her.

"Wake me!" she cried pitifully. "Wake me!"

Strangworth caught her in his arms and so saved her from falling to the ground.

4

Weeks later Mr. Strangworth stood on the steps of his house waiting to receive the occupants of a carriage which was coming up the drive. These were Lord Terry de Beach and the inevitable Harkles. Harkles permitted himself to show sympathy, almost to claim kindred with the great in their sorrow, by wearing half-mourning. His tiepin was a sombre arrangement of pearls recommended by his jeweller as "chaste" and "suitable." "Chaste" it might be called, though hardly "suitable," seeing that the seemingly simple design was the phallic symbol of maternity. Mr. Harkles unconsciously sporting that inappropriate symbol, was a joy to initiates.

He descended first from the carriage and officiously helped his patron to alight. Lord Terry, in his own peculiar way, blessed him for his pains, and then anxiously asked Mr. Strangworth: "How is she to-day?"

"Getting on," Mr. Strangworth answered cheerfully; "but slowly, very slowly."

"Still she is getting on, thank God!" Lord Terry exclaimed in a tone of relief.

"Harkles, my dear chap," said Strangworth, grasping Mr. Harkles's arm compellingly. "You'd like to go to the chapel; I know you would. You've only an hour for contemplation. And pray for us, if you can. Pray for the sick and sorrowful. We need your prayers."

There was no resisting Strangworth's genial compulsion; his assumption that Harkles's soul yearned for the secret seclusion of the chapel. Day after day Mr. Harkles found himself there doing penance perforce, in trepidation; subject to the spirit of the place, sensibly wrought upon by influence he dreaded and would have warded off; even praying against them, a singular prayer. He prayed that he might not be converted in spite of himself. For what profit could Mr. Harkles foresee in the

gain of a soul he had no use for, at the cost of everything in the world that, to his mind, made life desirable?

Mr. Strangworth hustled him into the lift, and watched it ascend, an enigmatical smile on his lips. Was it taking Mr. Harkles up to heaven, or only as far up as he would ever get?

But in one respect Mr. Harkles found himself entitled to be restrainedly triumphant, for had he not said that it was one of the Brabant boys? Anyone could see now that his original two-and-two made four. He worked it out to everybody's satisfaction,—showing the Duchess in opposition to the marriage; the Duke surreptitiously aiding and abetting; mother and son eventually reconciled; and the happy ending only frustrated by that accursed accident. Mrs. Filmer Dabbs, applauding his acumen, wept for the poor young Marchioness, whom, she declared, she had always befriended and loved, and always would.

Daily the old Terrier drove out to Strangworth House to inquire, and daily, tremblingly, in bitter remorse, he confessed the same sin in the same words: "You know, Gregor, that I am to blame, damned sinner that I am. If I had kept my head clear that night, I should have saved the whole situation. In my own dinin'-room, I saw—I saw how serious it was. Just for a moment I seemed to see 'em, the whole three of 'em standin' together, as plain as I see you now. I saw the truth in that instant, and I saw what to fear—yet I made a beast of myself. But never again! I've sworn off alcohol for ever, on my honour as a gentleman. Never again shall I put an enemy in my mouth to steal away my brains. So shall I keep my mouth shut. You believe me, Strangworth? You believe me? What I know I know, but my mouth is shut. Never to a livin' soul on earth, not even to you, shall what I know be put into words. I'd cut my tongue out first, as I'm a livin' sinner. God forgive me! I shall never forgive myself."

This generally ended the interview, but to-day he had more on his mind. "She is not goin' to die then?" he let fall at last, after lengthy reflection.

"Die? No! Why should she die?"

"They generally die," said Lord Terry de Beach.

"Convention, my dear Terrier, old-fashioned convention," Strangworth answered hotly. "The wronged heroine was done for! Gods and men have no more use for her, therefore to suit their own convenience they made it her duty to get out of the

way! But the healthy-minded modern young woman takes the opposite view of her duty. She sets a higher value on herself. She has to pay, Lord knows, in suffering, but she has the courage to live for others. She does not take injustice lying down, she would resist it—to right the wronged. It may be that the old gods are subtler than they were when death was the punishment for misfortune. Under the circumstances it would be easier to die than to live. But the pity of it in this case! The loss to suffering humanity! Would you rob the world of sympathy so widened and deepened, and of understanding so enriched by experience? And what has she done that she can be blamed for? Made a mistake! Under circumstances, too, that rendered mistakes inevitable."

"The modern woman is incalculable," said Lord Terry de Beach.

"On the contrary, my dear friend," Strangworth exploded again, "you can reckon on her—and that's more than you could do on any woman shaped to man's convenience and prejudice. Women answer to expectation. They used to answer to what men expected of them, ranking them as lower animal; now they answer to what they expect of themselves, and they expect great things of themselves."

Lord Terry grunted and returned to the case in point. "How about her position?" he asked.

"Ah, that's the crux," Mr. Strangworth groaned. "She is saddled with that. It is quite unassailable. Deplorable too, but there is no help for it. Nobody is being wronged, that is one comfort. False gods aid us to our undoing. She rejected the higher power she had in herself and put her faith in the strength of social position, and she must dree her weird where she is. But she had to be taught a lesson in values. She will learn to appreciate values now, and find herself. And when she finds herself she will be great. Die, man!" he broke off. "You would have her die poetically according to convention! She's too strong, I tell you, to concede to convention the right to dispose of her. She is not a criminal, you must remember, she is a victim; to live down all that has befallen her is her right and will be her glory."

"She has much to live down——"

"In herself. But please God she will recover all she has lost that is worth having."

"Amen," said Lord Terry de Beach.

5

Upstairs in a great airy bedroom Mrs. Bosc was sitting, a somewhat shrunken, weary Mrs. Bosc, sad of heart, but resigned to the past, and not unhopeful of the future. Good may be made to flow from evil. On a little table at her side stood a crucifix, symbol of the greatest crime ever committed on earth, yet with what glorious results! Mrs. Bosc's hands, holding her rosary, were folded on the knitting in her lap, her eyes were on the crucifix, a tender expression in them. Faith grows stronger in the faithful the more it is tried. Mrs. Bosc did not understand, but her faith had never burned more brightly, her faith in the Love that transmutes evil itself into good.

No other nurse had entered that sick room. For days and nights Ella had poured her ravings into Mrs. Bosc's safe ear alone. And now the worst was over. Mrs. Bosc had fought death itself and triumphed. She glanced now at the bed on the other side of the room, on which Ella lay, her white face turned upwards to the ceiling, her eyes closed, the long, thick braid of her dusky hair a cloud upon the pillow. Only the faint stirring of the lace on her bosom as she breathed and an occasional crimping of the fingers of the hand extended at her side showed that she was still alive. Time seemed suspended in the silent room. Through the open windows came the twittering of birds, the rustling of light airs playing with the leaves, the scents flowers were spreading abroad; footfalls, voices of men;—signs that the world without was unconcernedly going its way, apart from the silence within.

Presently the door opened and Mr. Strangworth entered. He stood awhile looking down at the motionless figure on the bed, then tiptoed softly to Mrs. Bosc's side, and sat down. "Is she asleep?" he asked.

"She may be," Mrs. Bosc answered; "but she lies like that for hours without moving. She is progressing, though, rapidly. I see a great difference in these last few days. She has resigned herself to a future of some sort. This morning she said suddenly: 'If I have to live, I shall live bravely.'"

"Good!" said Mr. Strangworth. "She will too!"

After a pause he asked: "Will there be a favourable moment soon, do you think?"

"I think the time has come," she answered. "It will take her out of herself to have someone to think about—and help."

"You are not afraid——?"

"No. It will be a relief. Wait till she rouses herself."

The width of the room that divided them made it possible to talk quietly without being overheard. They sat silent awhile, their eyes on the crucifix.

"If only she had believed!" Mrs. Bosc sighed at last. "Her self-sufficiency has been her bane."

"She had no need to believe," he answered. "The witness was in herself. She had only to listen; she would have heard. She was gifted beyond the ordinary, but it was her intellect that she valued and fed; her rich, spiritual endowment——" he sighed and shook his head. "She thought in terms of war. It was not enough for her to right the wronged; she was for avenging them too. Not that she is to blame altogether for the wrong-thinking that has wrecked her. She started heavily handicapped by heredity, and wrong-thinking was instilled into her. Her pride and self-sufficiency were innate, and early influence did the rest."

"Predestined," Mrs. Bosc supposed.

"If you mean that Destiny may be an irresistible force for evil countenanced by heaven, you are wrong," he answered characteristically. "We are not puppets on strings held in the hands of destiny; it is from self-will that the pull comes which decides our actions. Man makes the evil of his own destiny, and not of his own alone, for no act is isolated in its consequences. We know the difference between right and wrong, it is explicitly stated, and when we persuade ourselves to a wrong act as excusable, we do so against the evidence, and at our peril. We make our own misery, and the misery of those about us, and of those who come after us."

"But when tendencies are innate——" she pleaded.

"They can be resisted. Only an idiot can go through life without becoming aware of the tendencies which he should resist. Divine justice sees to it that we are warned of them. Messengers meet us by the way——"

"God does not willingly afflict us, I know," she filled in the pause. "There was no other way with her, I suppose, but it seems cruel——"

"There is cruel to be kind," he reminded her. "Wrong-thinking in her case was a growth that had to be extirpated.

Every other means was tried and failed. A major operation was her only chance——"

"And they called her the Winged Victory!" Mrs. Bosc broke silence, contemptuous of their prescience.

"Better called than they knew," he differed from her. "Consider her prototype, the Winged Victory of War. She fell on evil days too. She was lost, as it seemed, but look at her now——"

"Her ship wrecked, her wings broken——"

"But the divine spirit of her! You forget her divine indestructible spirit! Is she not set on high again and honoured for the loveliness nor man nor time can destroy? And our Winged Victory of War, of hate, of revenge, is she not likewise the victim of her own weapons? And may she not likewise be recovered and set on high, to gladden our hearts? In spite of all that has befallen her, still the Winged Victory. The Winged Victory of Love!"

"Poor innocent sinner," sighed Mrs. Bosc.

"The kind of splendid sinner who makes a splendid saint," he stoutly maintained.

A movement drew their eyes to the bed. Ella was looking at them. Mr. Strangworth went to her, and took her hand. "Better?" he asked cheerily.

She smiled a brave assurance.

"Ella," he began, and stopped short, stroking her hand, playing with her fingers. His hesitation quickened her attention. "Ella," he tried again, "have you no word of comfort for your poor, unhappy father?"

Two great tears welled up in her eyes and slowly overflowed, blessed tears from a broken and contrite heart. Feebly but distinctly she replied: "Tell him—tell him I love him dearly."

Her eyes closed. In her great weakness the effort had been too much for her. She floated away to an immense distance, but only for an instant, she fancied, though there was a considerable interval. When she recovered consciousness it seemed to her that Mr. Strangworth was still holding her hand. She looked up.

"Your Grace!" she exclaimed.

"Your father, dearest."

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